



Students as Partners
Near peer teaching in design studio courses

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Images - from DLA design studio courses

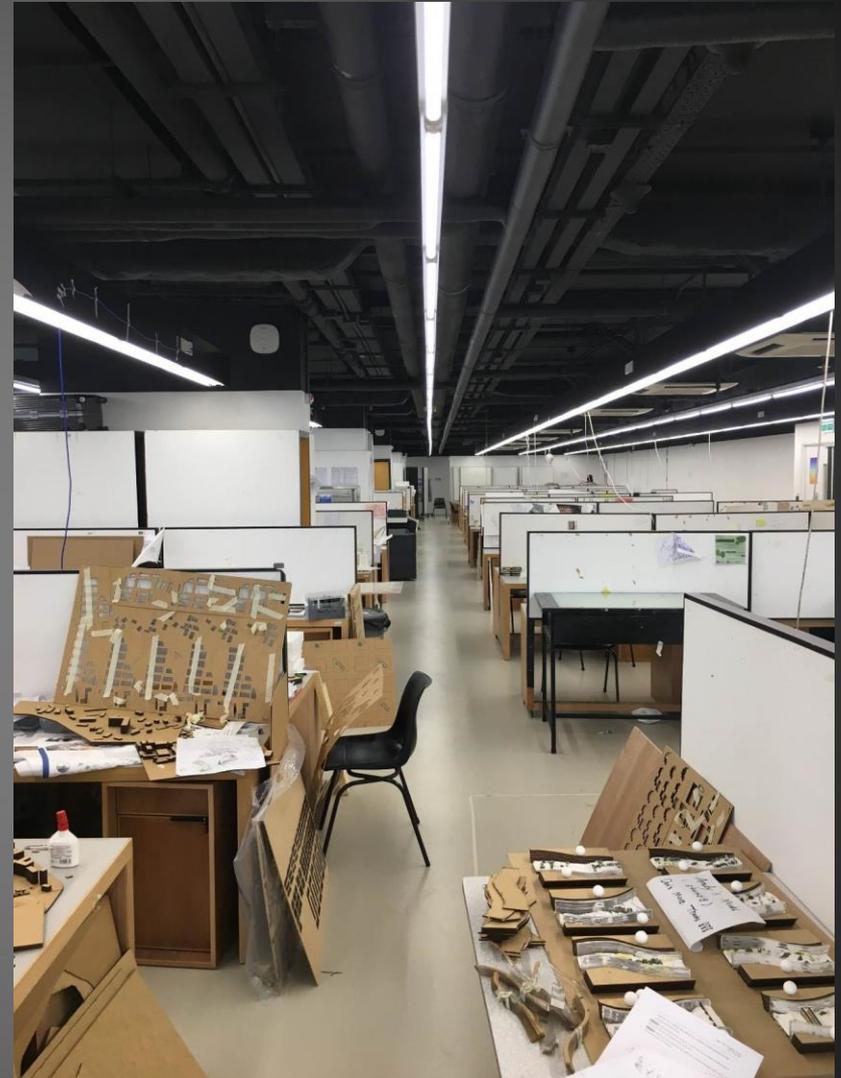
Student teaching assistants (STA) in Design Studio Courses

STA (near-peer teachers) increasingly used in Fac Architecture to support instructors, esp. in the design disciplines (Architecture and Landscape, Urban Design)

Example:

ARCH3204 - a small BALS3 design studio course with just a single instructor (most design studios have multiple instructors).

One MLA2 STA working 4 hours per week with one instructor.



Nature of design studio teaching

- Problem based projects, experiential, authentic
- Indeterminate, critical, reflective thinking
- Teaching process rather than product, argumentation / architectural criticism
- Collaborative, team based, co-construction,
- Creative environment, active, dialogic, interplay between thinking & doing,
- Peer support and oversight



Intention for STA in this design studio course

Why do I need an STA?

To enhance learning in the class through:

- **Logistical assistant** - course preparation, arranging teaching spaces, field trips, guests, material resources, taking attendance. etc.
- **Technical assistant** (skills), tutorials / hands-on technical demonstration, facilitate access to learning resources, guidance on studio assignments, design project development
- **Co-designer** - working with instructor to develop assignment briefs, course activities - suggesting activities that they thought students would appreciate
- **Teacher / alternative voice**, answering questions, sounding board for students, prompt, supplementary feedback, interpretation



Intentions for STAs in design studio courses

- **Cheerleader** (go-between) - support, encouragement, time management, additional conduit for student-instructor communication
- **Extending T&L hours outside class time** – can work in parallel or independently (often out of class hours) to give students greater access to advice
- **Second opinion for teachers**, on student reactions, student performance



Structure / working arrangements for STAs

- STAs from upper years teaching courses in more junior years
- Employed (paid) part-time on an hourly rate, usually 2-4 hours per week (avoid conflict with their studies). Funded by the Division
- Assigned to one class, design studio or seminar course (+40 students)



Structure / working arrangements for STAs

- **Appointment**
 - invite applications for the next semester
 - assess candidates against academic / co-curricular track record, instructors personal experience, applicants known skills / areas of interest
- **Supervised by the course instructor** – managing STA, giving direction, mentoring (coaching), time keeping, performance evaluation



Impact on learning / benefit to students?

Informal feedback from students during class – very positive

- Student confidence, better working process (avoids stuckness), time management
- More peer communication
- Improved technical proficiency – core knowledge and basic technical skills
- Better judgment / perspective (in reflecting on design process)
- More mature / professional attitude, reduces distractive behaviours



Student reflections on the experience

Short semi-structured interview with two students from the ARCH3204 studio class

Benefits to the students

- Closer to students age than instructor, more familiar with latest software
- Can give advice, different from the instructor?
- Available outside class time.

Perceived benefits to STA

- Help the STA sharpen / revise own skills and ability in expressing concepts
- Helps develop their knowledge
- Feeling of helping fellow design students
- Getting to know students outside their own cohort (vertical integration).

Perceived downsides to being an STA

- Could be time consuming – esp. in design studio which can be very intensive – other programs would be easier as STA role is much more limited
- Design students (esp. higher years) may have not time, may already be tutoring elsewhere
- Maybe too much effort vs potential benefits (not too much to learn from it).



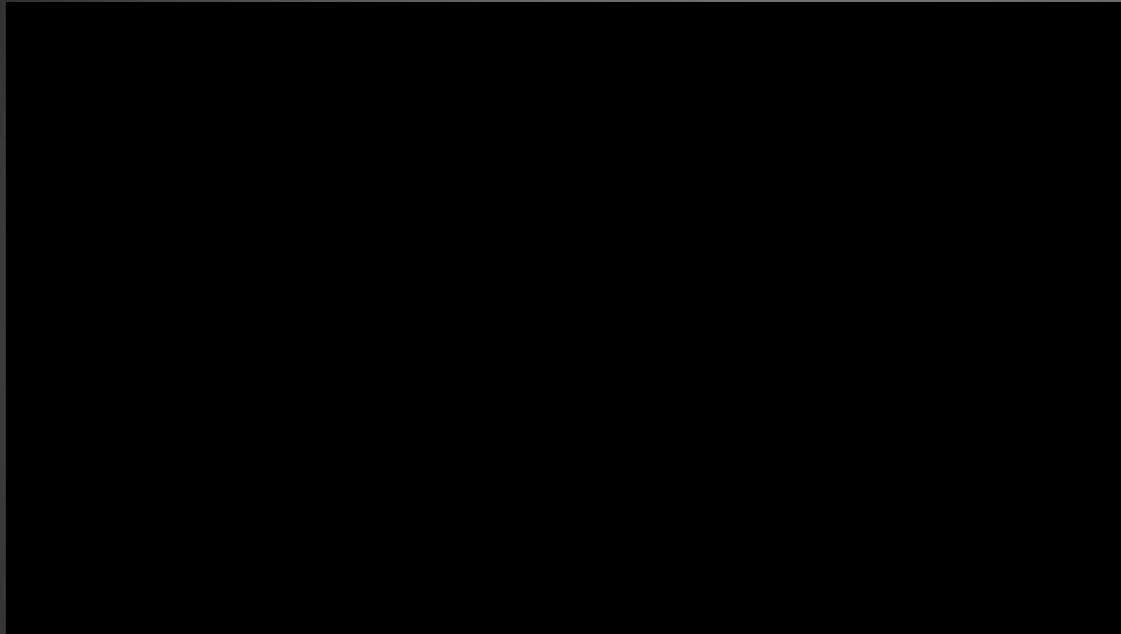
Benefits to the Division / long term perspective

- Developing a **community of young teachers**
 - Interaction of instructors / TAs / STAs.
 - Self organized ... support from within TA group. Multiple STAs working in parallel (on different courses) to resolve issues.
- Developing a **culture of teaching / community of practice in teaching**
 - year-on-year gain of experience (students who have had STAs on their courses more likely to become STAs themselves).
 - Influence on others, encourage others to participate.



STA reflections on the experience (2 min interview)

*Short interview with Jay MAN (2nd year MLA Student), and
STA for ARCH3204 studio class*

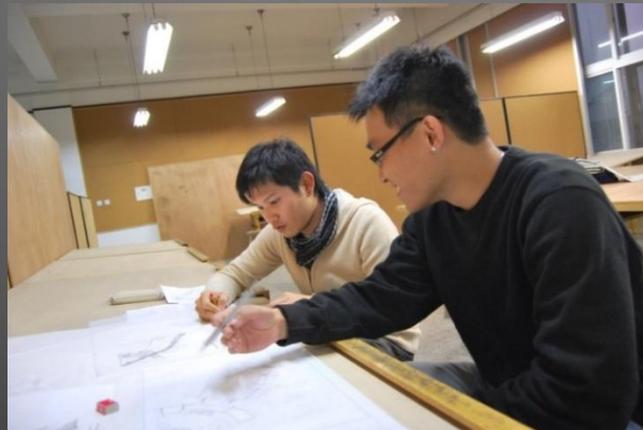


<https://youtu.be/iqA8tHxgfIU>

Perceived benefits to the STA

... from other STAs in design studios

- Learning teaching methods, teaching craft
- Finding voice / confidence / authority in my knowledge / understanding of design by explaining it to others / testing their opinions
- Change my relationship with teaching
- Engage with other year groups, positive contribution to other students learning
- Fun, personally rewarding
- Earn some money



Lessons on STA

Applicability to other courses

- Good for studio courses, but STAs are beneficial to many types of course
- Easy to set up and administer
- Good for skills training
- Effective bridge between instructors and students
- Helps build a community of teaching practice
- Strong interest amongst students
- Promotes students understanding of teaching

