

## NARRATIVE 7.

# IGTA

**Thir Budhathoki**

University of Arizona

My experience as an International Graduate Teaching Assistant (IGTA) has been marked by border crossings and negotiations on different levels. Returning to grad school after working as an assistant professor for many years was a different experience compared to most of my cohort in their mid-twenties. Likewise, traveling 8,000 miles from home was not just about crossing physical borders; I was in a different world where I had to navigate every single thing both on and off campus. To a person who learned English as a foreign language and studied and worked in a different education system, getting ready to teach a class of domestic students after a five-day training—no matter how good—was scary.

My teaching experience was helpful even though college composition was new to me but preparing the syllabus and navigating instructional technologies like D2L's Brightspace learning management system, which I had never used before, were most challenging. Besides, self-consciousness about my accent and fear of not being understood added additional strain to my already impaired self-confidence. The preceptorship class that met once a week provided a safe space to discuss classroom-related issues but, as the only IGTA in the group, it took me more time to navigate even that safe space. I felt overwhelmed and lost on many occasions but the report systems in the writing program, Office of Instruction and Assessment, and 24/7 tech support helped me handle those situations.

The most unnerving experience was going online in the mid-spring of 2020 due to COVID-19. It was an unprecedented time and there was little time for this shift. Additionally, I was taking my comprehensive exams. But, in retrospect, I feel that we all did what was humanly possible. Since then, I have been working online, quarantined alone in my studio and experiencing a range of conflicting emotions every single day: frustration over lost freedom, the canceled trip home to get my wife and daughter here, and all the challenges and complexities of online instruction on one hand, and a sense of privilege and gratitude for being able to work safely from home, learn about new technologies, and focus on my academic and professional development on the other.

In sum, the dual role as a student and an instructor in a different country has put me in what Gloria Anzaldúa would call the borderlands—where confusion and contradictions give intense pain but offer creative possibilities as well.

Switching back to student life after a long gap, leaving my family behind initially due to the fear of visa denial and lack of health insurance coverage and later due to the pandemic, navigating the new spaces and technologies as an IGTA who, as Tao Zhang writes, often finds himself “trapped by invisible forces in difficult pedagogical relationships and the subsequent emotional drain while working late nights to catch up with necessary work” have been exhausting (11). Yet, I haven’t stopped seeing the light at the end of the tunnel where I am eager to get in 2023 and chart my way ahead.

## **WORKS CITED**

Zhang, Tao. ““Your English is Accented!”: Surviving With Otherness While Approaching Positive Becoming.” *International Review of Qualitative Research*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2021, pp. 476-496, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940844720943510>.