

Ways to Integrate LAs: an Investigation of the 52 LA-Facilitated Courses at CU Boulder and FRCC during Spring 2019



Learning Assistant Program
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Abstract

Undergraduate Learning Assistants (LAs) support student learning in 18 departments across CU Boulder and Front Range Community College. During spring 2019, 201 LAs spent ~18,000 hours directly working with ~11,000 students ("seats"). To better understand the depth and breadth of all 52 LA-Facilitated courses during Spring 2019, we asked all new LAs to report the number of hours they spent in each class context, the amount of time spent directly interacting with students, and a description of their responsibilities. We found that all LAs operate within at least one of three primary contexts: lecture, lab, or recitation, but most LAs work within multiple contexts. Using this information we have developed materials for new LAs that outline the attributes of their position from the perspective of previous LAs. Further, we are characterizing how the ways LAs interact with students is similar within, and differs between, contexts. This characterization will be used to help faculty and the LA Program better train and support LAs, and help each instructional team work together to better facilitate student learning in the classroom.

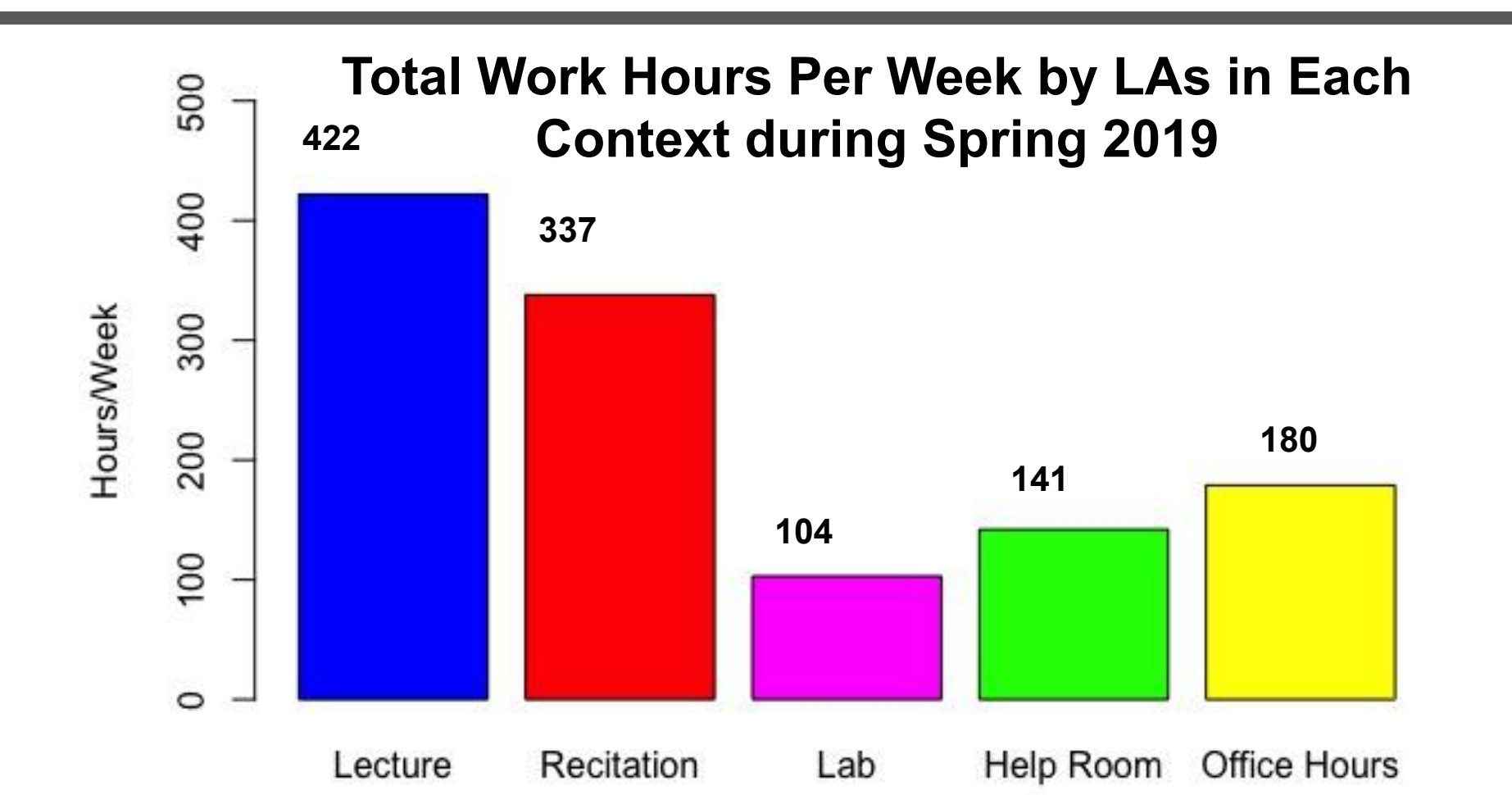
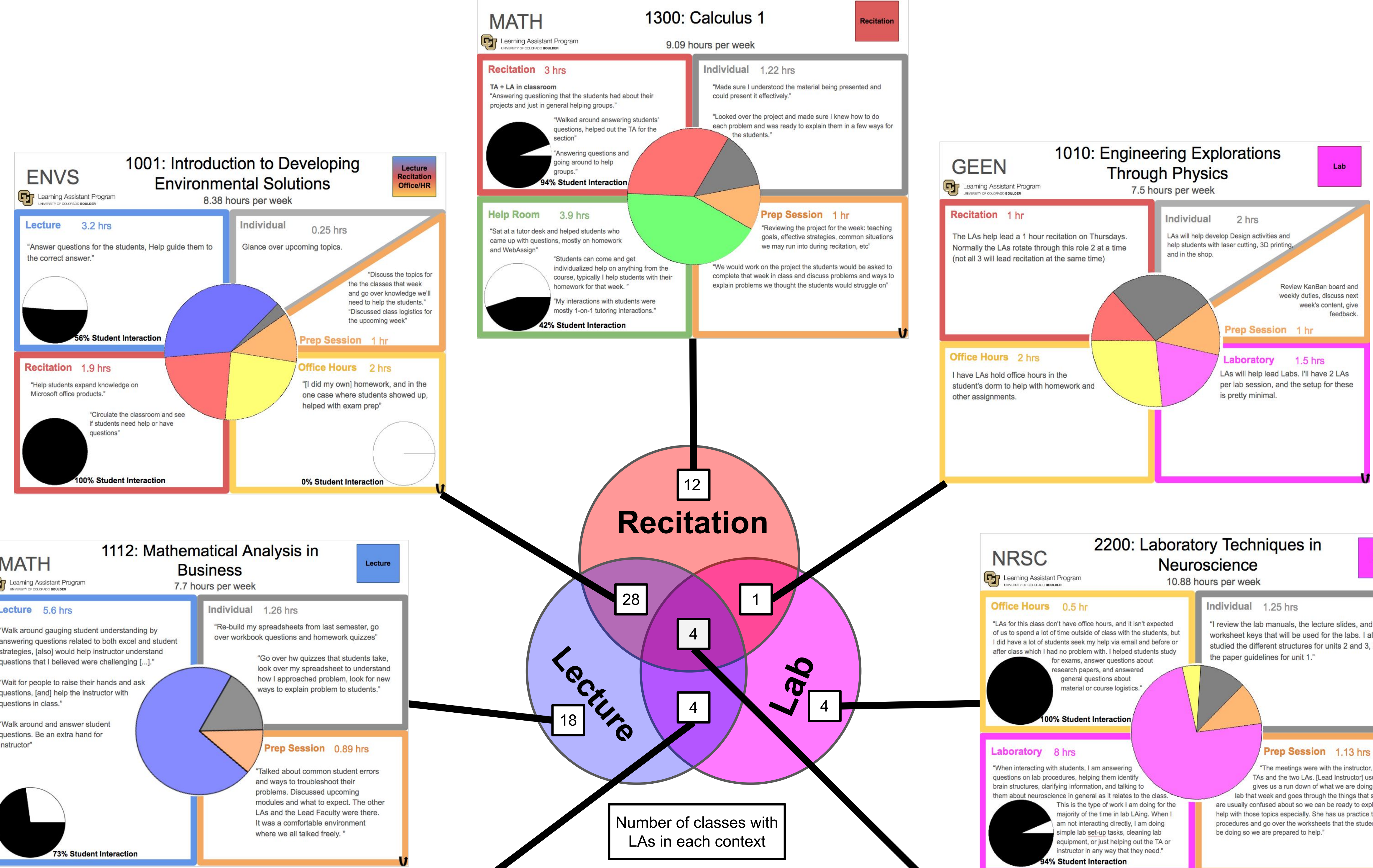
Primary Contexts:

Where LA's have most of their student interaction

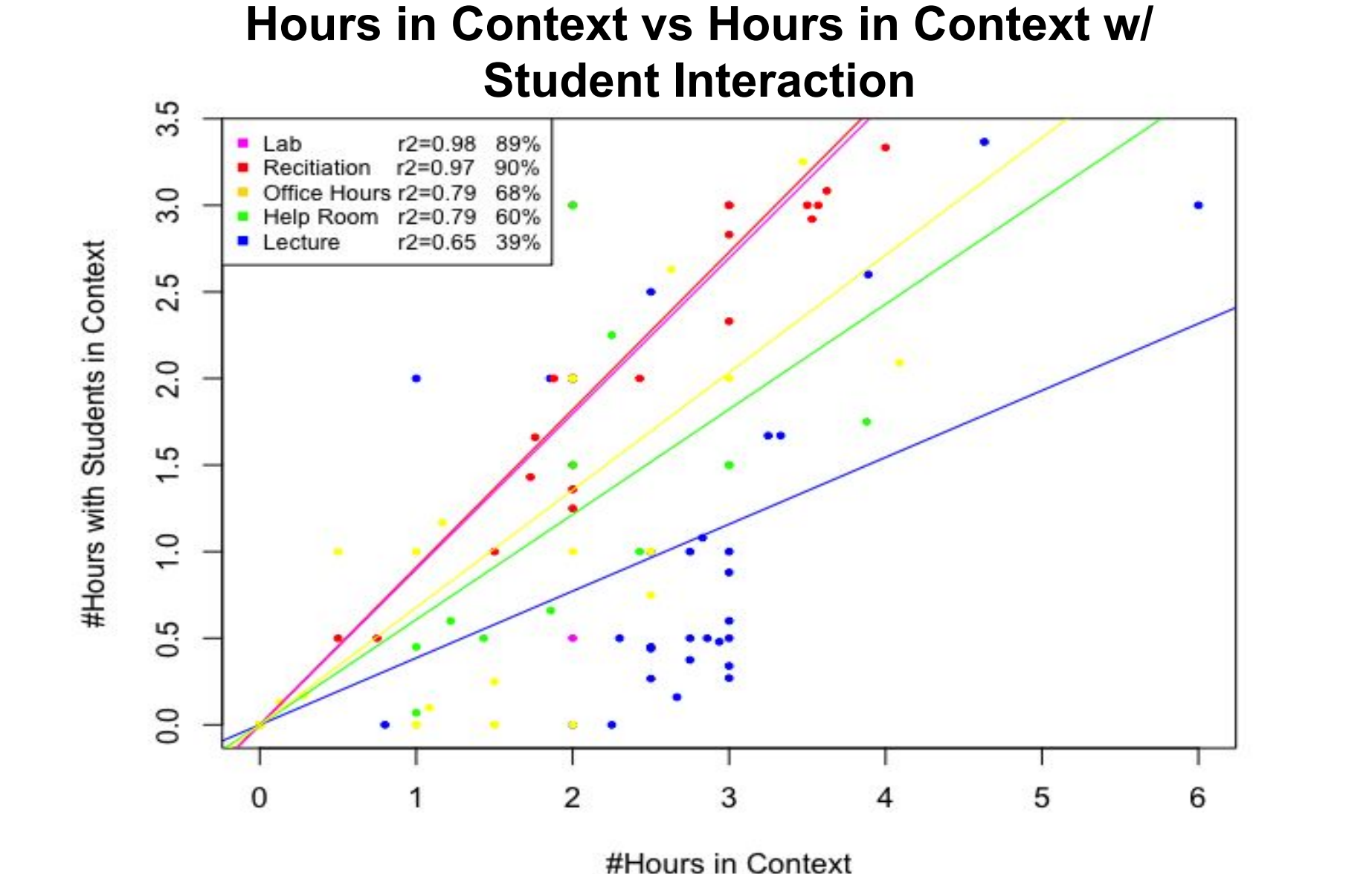
Lecture: a significant portion of class is spent with the instructor talking and students listening.

Recitation/Group Session: required or optional for students; typically has prepared materials; may be led by instructor, TA, and/or LA; the majority of time is spent on collaborative group work; a.k.a. "work group," "help session," "learning sessions," "co-seminar."

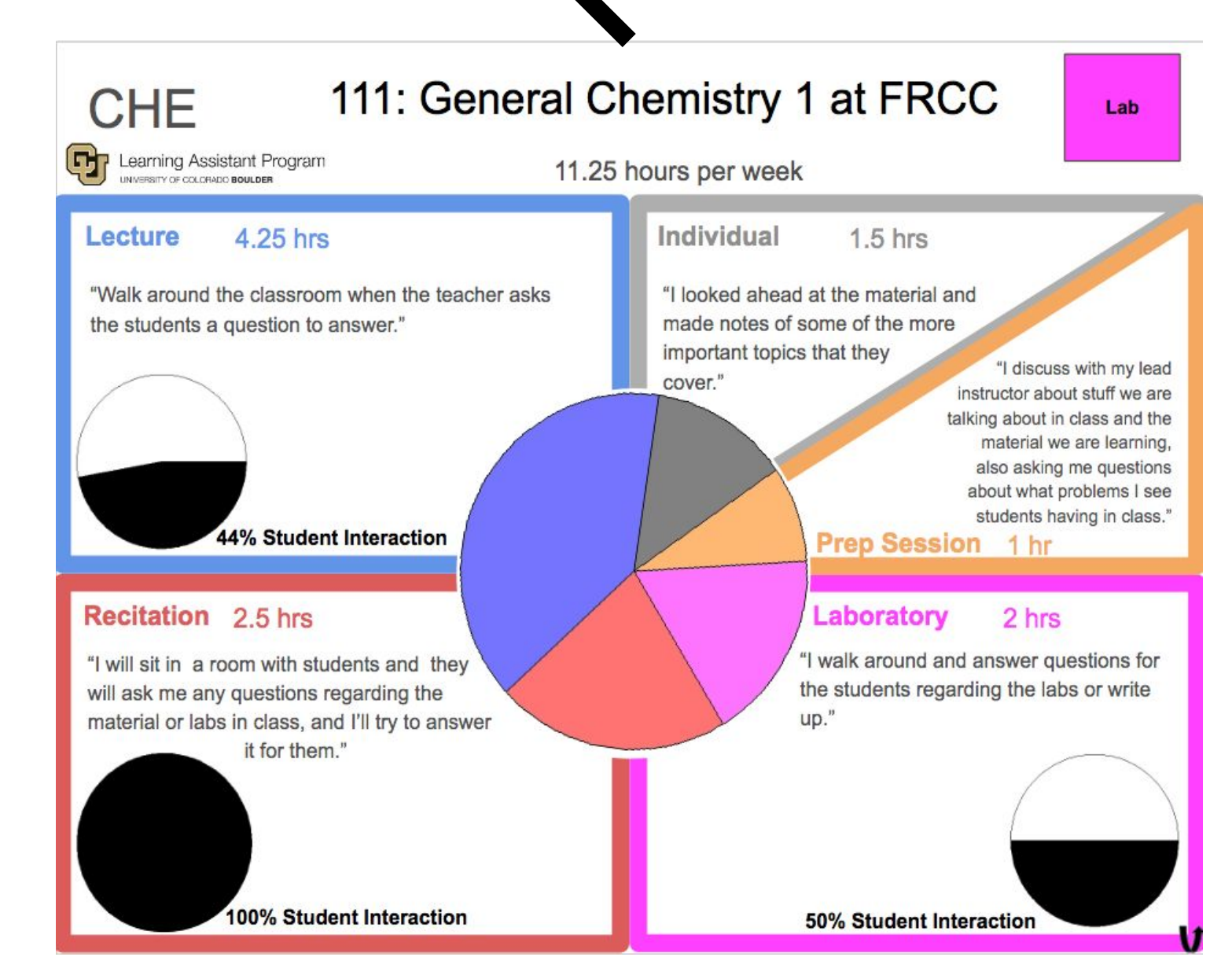
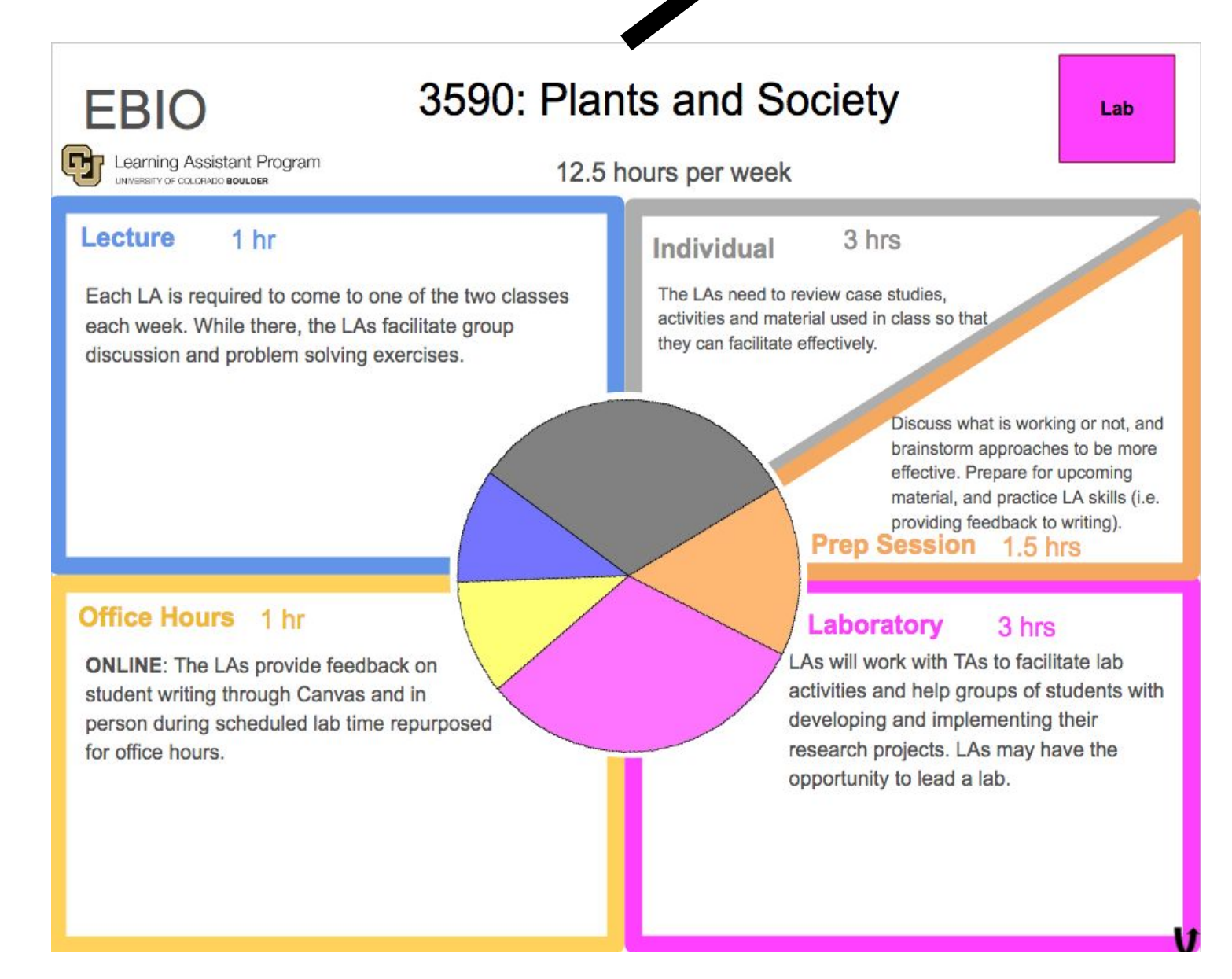
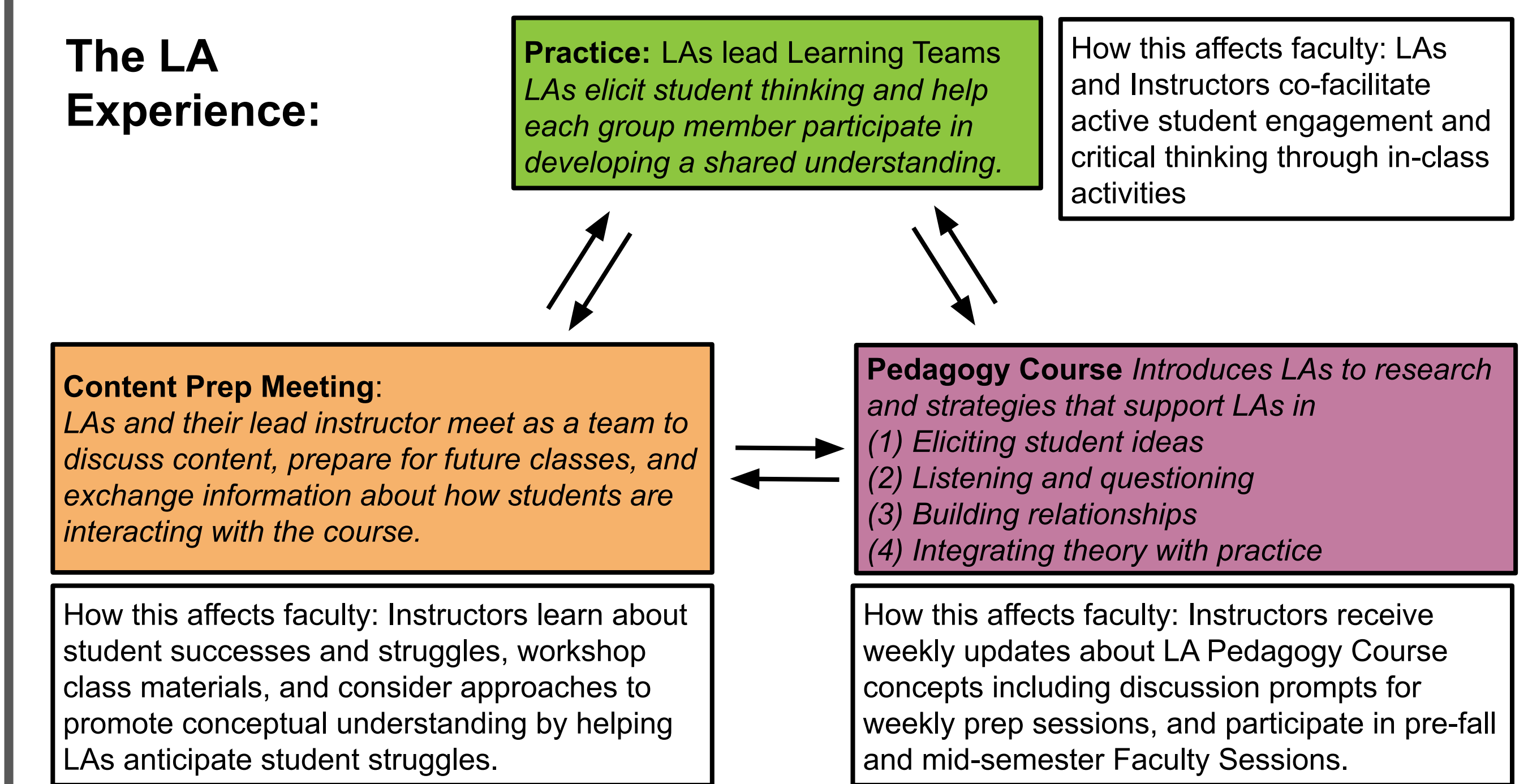
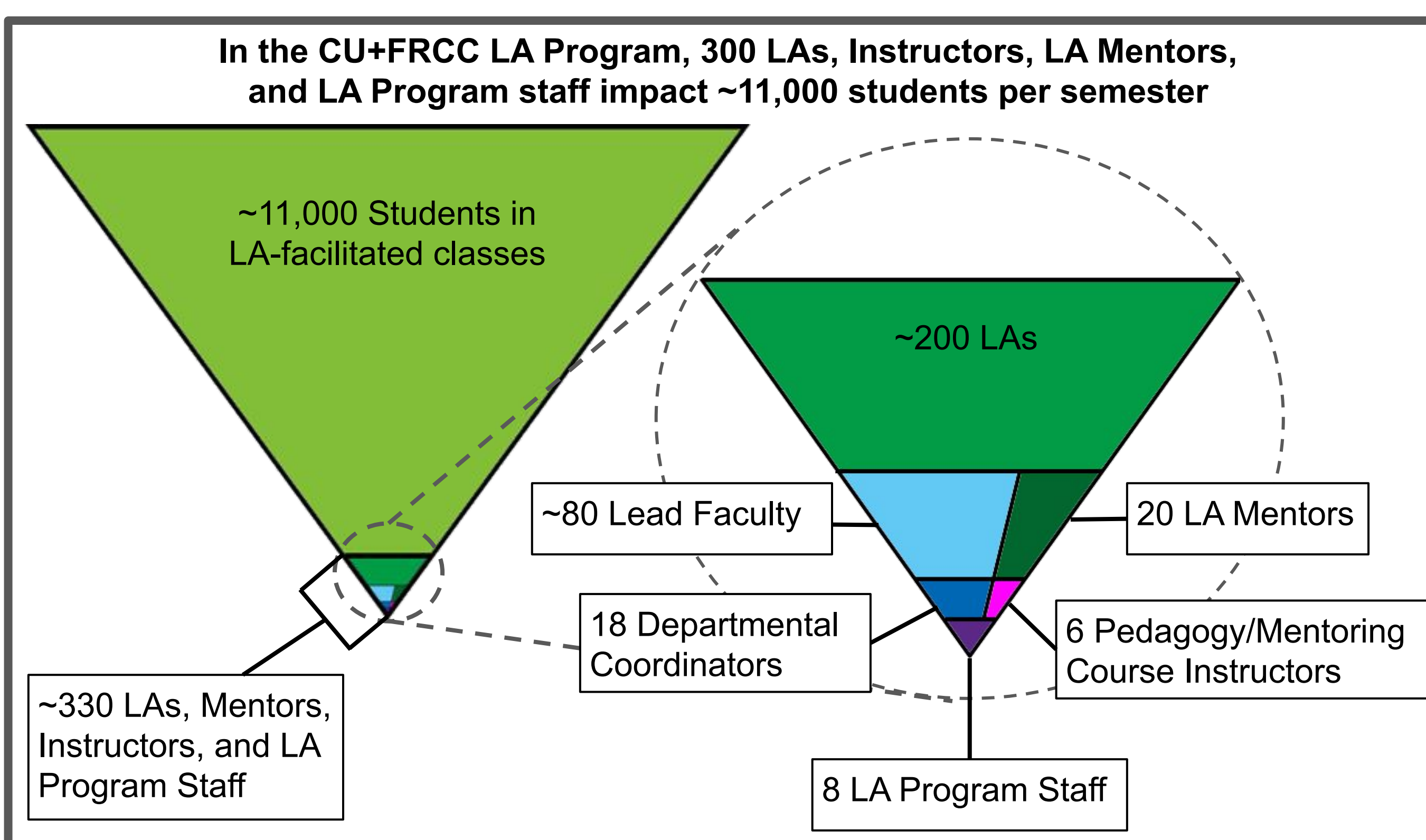
Laboratory: students are engaged in empirical research for the majority of class; may be led by instructor, TA, and/or LA.



During Spring 2019, LAs spent 1,184 hours/week in a primary or secondary context (# hours listed above bars). LAs spend 863 hours/week in lecture, recitation, and lab, and 321 hours per week in help rooms or office hours.



LAs in the primary contexts of lab and recitation consistently have ~90% student interaction in these settings. In contrast, LAs in lecture spend ~40% of that time interacting with students, although this varies widely between courses. Secondary contexts of office hours and help room hours have ~70% and ~60% student interaction, respectively. ($p < 0.05$ for all fits)



Help room: a specified location where students can find help during most weekday hours, although perhaps not with their own LA, but students know someone will be there to help with their specific course

Office hours: may take place in a departmentally-specified location, but the hours are not generally publicized and students typically only visit their LA

Weekly Prep session: A faculty-led meeting with LAs and sometimes TAs, spent reflecting on previous lessons, and preparing for future student learning.

Individual: LAs review their own notes from when they the course, preview future materials, and brainstorm strategies for facilitating student learning.

Secondary Contexts
 Secondary contexts are primarily times that are optional for students participation. This in general means that the amount (%) of student interaction is lower than in primary contexts. Almost all LAs will have some kind of office hours or help room requirement. Office hours and help room hours may both occupy similar roles for students and LAs.

Preparatory Contexts
 Learning Assistants spend, on average, 1:10 in weekly prep sessions and 1:40 individually, preparing for their LA Appointment for ~3 hours per week. Both prep sessions and individual preparation times are factored into the 8 hours per week that LAs are expected to work.

Main takeaways:

- Learning Assistants are widespread across CU Boulder and FRCC consisting of ~18,000 hours of work directly influencing ~11,000 students each semester
- ~200 LAs per semester are supported by ~130 faculty, staff, instructors, and LA Mentors.
- There are three main contexts in which LAs interact with students. Each context has a different average percent interaction time with students, with Lab and Recitation contexts having the highest percent LA-Student interaction (~90%).
- LAs also interact with students in two secondary contexts: help room and/or office hours.
- LAs spend ~3 hours per week in individual and instructional team weekly preparation.
- Information collected from LAs informs prep sheets that new LAs (or anyone else that finds them helpful) can use to help navigate the beginning stages of their classes.

Future Directions:

- Understand how LAs spend their time in comparison to the faculty course proposal.
- Continue to gather a more comprehensive view of how LAs operate within the Learning Assistant Program in departments and individual courses.
- Characterize the experiences of LAs for consistency of the LA experience.
- Understand how much time LAs directly interact with students in different contexts and how to enhance student-interaction time to bolster student learning.
- Connect faculty with similar types of courses to develop and refine curricular materials and trade LA best-practices.
- Identify classes that utilize LAs in unique ways and ones that maximize the potential of LAs.

What would you like to know about Learning Assistants?