

# **Report of the Pedagogical Training Subcommittee of the Provost's Committee on Graduate Student Teaching**

**June 3, 2009**

## **I. Importance of Pedagogical Training**

Recognizing the value of teaching experience to graduate education and training, the University of Chicago recently institutionalized programmatic teaching requirements for students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Divinity School with the implementation of the Graduate Aid Initiative (GAI). Some departments in these academic units and other divisions and schools across the University already required or encouraged graduate students to gain classroom experience before completing their doctoral degrees.

Given the high expectations for the quality of the educational experience for all of its students, the University has an obligation to both the graduate students who are learning to teach and to the undergraduate students who will be taught by them to ensure that graduate students serving as instructors<sup>1</sup> are well-prepared for their teaching assignments. Reaching students for effective teaching experience, which in turn facilitates the development of important communication, evaluation, and interpersonal skills and often enhances the teacher's own scholarship, is crucial to the University's mission of preparing the next generation of scholars who will do path-breaking work at the forefront of their academic and professional fields.

## **II. Charge and Process of the Subcommittee**

As part of its efforts to improve the support the University provides to graduate students, in 2008, the Provost formed the Committee on Graduate Student Teaching. The committee made recommendations regarding teaching remuneration and then split into two subcommittees to address specific issues related to the graduate student teaching experience. The Pedagogical Training Subcommittee was charged with reviewing and making recommendations to improve pedagogical training for graduate students by examining what teacher training efforts are working well, how the University might streamline current efforts to make teacher training more effective and efficient, how the infrastructure might better support teacher training, and how students feel about their teacher training. The members of the Subcommittee included:

---

<sup>1</sup> The category of "instructors" includes lecturers, teaching assistants, course assistants, interns, and other positions requiring sustained interaction with students in a classroom or group instruction setting.

Helma Dik, Chair, *Associate Professor of Classics and the College*  
Patrick Hall, *Dean of Students of the Social Sciences Division*  
Tera Lavoie, *4th-year Ph.D. student in Pathology*  
Jose Quintans, *William Rainey Harper Professor in the Department of Pathology and the*  
*College, Associate Dean and Master of the Biological Sciences Collegiate Division*  
Andrew Yale, *5th-year Ph.D. student in English*  
Staff: Beth Niestat, *Planning Manager for Student Initiatives*

Over the course of fall and winter quarters, the Subcommittee met with the directors of the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Writing Program, and the Summer English Language Institute; with faculty and staff of various academic departments; and with groups of graduate students.<sup>2</sup>

### **III. Current pedagogical training efforts**

There are approximately 2,500 graduate student teaching positions each year at the University, including lecturers, course and teaching assistants, Humanities Core Interns, writing interns, language department lecturers, drill instructors, and studio assistants.

The quality and quantity of graduate student teacher training opportunities at the University vary tremendously across divisions and among departments. Depending on whether or not a student has a personal interest in pedagogy, pedagogical training can vary considerably even from student to student within the same program. Requirements and resources for preparatory training and general review of teaching approaches and policies before being assigned a teaching position also vary greatly across both hiring and academic units.

Current practice generally follows an apprenticeship model, locating pedagogical training in the concrete practical experience of assistantships and internships under the tutelage of the responsible faculty member. Some academic units, like the Biological Sciences Division, offer a centralized division-wide pedagogical training course. Some departments, like the Math Department, have institutionalized teacher training for their graduate students, who serve as teaching assistants for the entirety of the second year in the program and then go on to teach their own courses. In the Economics Department, graduate students are introduced gradually to the undergraduate curriculum through tutoring, serving as teaching assistants, and eventually lecturing; the Economics Department holds extensive teacher training sessions for first-time lecturers before allowing students to run their own class. Other departments offer little or no pedagogical training or support. For many graduate students, pedagogical training is entirely a matter

---

<sup>2</sup> Faculty and staff that the Subcommittee met with included Jane Dailey (History), Fred Donner (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations), Vera Dragasich (Chemistry), Stuart Gazes (Physics), Elaine Hadley (English), Diane Hermann (Math), Seth Richardson (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations), Nancy Schwartz (Biological Sciences Division), Grace Tsiang (Economics), Gary Tubb (South Asian Languages and Civilizations), and Larry Zbikowski (Music). The Subcommittee met with 8 graduate students with a range of teaching experiences.

of on-the-job experience and wholly dependent on the attention, interest, and expertise of the particular faculty member responsible for the course.

The Subcommittee strongly encourages departments, programs, and individual faculty to develop and implement policies, resources, and practices that will support graduate teachers and their pedagogical improvement. Some degree of pedagogical training clearly must happen at the department and program level, with considerable involvement by faculty. Departments and programs are best able to communicate field-specific information on the communication and evaluation of substantive scholarly knowledge. Faculty are essential to pedagogical training because they both model great teaching and provide direct feedback to student instructors about how they perform such tasks as constructing a syllabus, developing an exam, and preparing a lecture.

With the understanding that the Council on Teaching is currently examining pedagogical training at the departmental level, the Subcommittee focused its efforts on centralized teacher-training services at the University. At the institutional level, there are essentially three units that offer programs to enhance and improve the quality of graduate student teaching: the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Writing Program, and the Summer English Language Institute.

### **Center for Teaching and Learning<sup>3</sup>**

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), created in 1999 under the auspices of the College, the four divisions, and the Office of the Provost, offers individual teaching consultation and videotaped teaching evaluations, workshops, and seminars on various aspects of pedagogy. Director Elizabeth Chandler, who in the past has reported to both John Boyer (the Dean of the College) and to Steven Gabel in the Office of the Provost, currently reports only to John Boyer. She oversees 1.25 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members, including a program coordinator and an advanced graduate student researcher, and she also pays part-time consulting fees to various individuals including a professional workshop leader and a website manager. The CTL's annual \$184,400 budget is funded by contributions from the divisions, the College, and the Office of the Provost. In addition to that budget, money from the Mellon Foundation supporting the Midwest Faculty Seminar funds 30 percent of the CTL staff salaries.

The CTL, which offers a Certificate in University Teaching, has regular classes on 11 different topics ranging from course design, discussion leading, and lecturing to creating teaching portfolios, creating philosophy of teaching statements, and pitching research. In addition to these classes, the CTL offers mid-course reviews and individual teaching consultations for graduate students and faculty seeking help in assessing their teaching.

There has been a considerable increase in usage of the CTL in the past four years, from six requests for individual teaching consultations in fall of 2005 to 18 in fall

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the Center for Teaching and Learning's website at <http://teaching.uchicago.edu/>.

of 2008 and from 65 participants in seminars and workshops in fall of 2005 to 129 in fall of 2008. The attendance at the Fall Workshop on Teaching also increased during this time, from 253 participants in 2005 to 308 participants in 2008. These increases represent an increase in demand each year and an increase in the rate of growth of that demand. In spite of the increased demand, staff capacity diminished with the loss—not to be replaced—of a half-time professional staff member in the fall of 2008, bringing the staff level to the current 2.25 FTE. The CTL reports that it is operating at capacity and cannot meet increasing need.

While there has been an increase in use of the CTL, it is clear that the CTL serves few graduate students *while* they are serving as instructors in any capacity. For the most part, the CTL does not focus on training or skills improvement for teaching assistants, and Elizabeth Chandler reports that its main constituents are advanced graduate students who are preparing to go on the academic job market and need proof of teaching qualifications.

According to Elizabeth Chandler, the University of Chicago's CTL ranks second to last of Ivy Plus institutions in terms of budget and FTE staff for teaching centers, although it can be difficult to compare since the centers have very different mandates. Columbia (with a budget of \$150,000) has the smallest staff with 1.25 FTE's and Michigan (with a budget of \$2.4 million) and Harvard (with a budget of \$1.6 million, the same as Stanford's) have the largest staffs, with 25 and 20.5 FTE's, respectively.

### **Writing Program<sup>4</sup>**

The Writing Program, which began with one writing course offered in 1980 and expanded over the years to include more courses and support, has an annual budget of approximately \$800,000 and is funded in large part by the College, with additional support from the Booth School of Business, the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences and the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities, the deans of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and University Human Resources Management. Its director, Larry McEnerney, reports to John Boyer in the College and also works somewhat independently with the other funding sources identified above to develop programs specific to their needs. He oversees four FTE staff, including three senior staff and four graduate students who serve as assistant directors.

Each year, the Writing Program oversees teacher training for a total of approximately 50 graduate students. These training efforts include: 1) preparing approximately 30 new graduate students to teach in the Humanities Core in the College (participation in the Writing Program's training is a requirement for being a Core Intern); 2) training approximately 10 graduate students to teach in the advanced academic and professional writing course (also known as the Little Red Schoolhouse, see below), and 3) training six writing tutors as part of the College

---

<sup>4</sup>For more information, see the Writing Program's website at <http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/>.

Core Tutoring Program, which provides individual and small group support to undergraduates completing the Core requirements.

Larry McEnerney anticipates there may be a strain on the Writing Program's resources for instructor training with the implementation of the Graduate Aid Initiative's teaching requirement, as there may be fewer Humanities Core repeat interns and a corresponding need to train more than the approximately 30 new interns that the Writing Program currently trains each year. The Humanities Core employs approximately 100 interns every year.

The Little Red Schoolhouse, the writing course that was first offered in 1980 and grew into today's Writing Program, is a composition program that this year (Summer 2008-Spring 2009) served 125 undergraduates, 175 graduate students from the divisions, and 30 business school students. The vast majority of Writing Program students come from the Humanities Division, the Social Sciences Division, and the Divinity School.

The Writing Program is unusual among peer institutions, most of which offer a combination of a writing center and a freshman writing course to teach writing to students. Few other universities have advanced writing courses similar to the Little Red Schoolhouse, which specifically focuses on *academic* writing for advanced undergraduates and graduate students, rather than creative non-fiction, English as a Second Language, or technical writing as is common at other schools. It is therefore difficult to compare the Writing Program's budget and support with those of other schools because of the different ways schools address the teaching of writing. Larry McEnerney reports that many universities combine funding for English departments and writing programs, for example, and that Cornell, which has an endowed institute for writing, has a "remarkably rich program."

### **Summer English Language Institute<sup>5</sup>**

The Summer English Language Institute (SELI), established in 2001, is managed by Denise Jorgens (the Director of Programs and External Relations at International House) and reports to William L. McCartney, the Director of International House. The SELI's 2008-09 budget was just over \$100,000, and it was funded through a combination of 1) the divisions and schools based on their participation, 2) the budget of the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life and Dean of Students in the University (which includes International House), and 3) the student participants themselves. Defining FTE staff for the SELI is complicated by the fact that its staffing needs are short-term but intensive. In 2008, Madeline Hamblin (recently retired from the Office of Graduate Affairs) served as a part-time, temporary co-director with Denise Jorgens from June through November, and two graduate students were hired on an ad hoc basis for several months during the summer and fall as program coordinator and assistant.

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see the SELI's website at [http://ihouse.uchicago.edu/esl/esl\\_seli.shtml](http://ihouse.uchicago.edu/esl/esl_seli.shtml).

In addition, the SELI employed six instructors and two assistant instructors for the duration of the courses.

The SELI is an intensive language and acculturation program that can be designed to the specific needs of participating academic divisions and schools. With the exception of the medical school, all of the divisions and schools send students to participate in the SELI. Some schools such as the Booth School of Business, the Harris School of Public Policy, and the Law School have their own sessions dedicated for their students, and others send their students to the general courses designed for combined disciplines. Generally the SELI offers a two-week course, although in the past, the Chemistry Department and Physics Department module ran four weeks to address the need for these students to be able to perform teaching duties in their first year.

Although the SELI curriculum does not specifically cover pedagogical techniques and its curriculum is designed for general academic preparation, it is considered among the teaching-readiness programs offered by the University because it does also prepare some international students for classroom teaching, for example in the cases of Chemistry and Physics. Up until recently, some students in those departments were required to enroll in the SELI, but the Physics Department has decided to discontinue using the SELI for its students. In general, there is considerable uncertainty around the SELI's future because of funding questions.

As with the Writing Program, it is difficult to compare funding and staffing of teacher training programs for non-native English speakers with peer institutions, as the requirements and offerings vary considerably. The University of Pennsylvania, for example, pursuant to the requirements of the Pennsylvania English Fluency in Higher Education Act, requires language certification for all international student teachers and offers a seven-week summer course for international student teachers and offers a seven-week summer course for international teaching assistants. Yale requires students to score a 50 or above on the SPEAK (Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit) test before being offered a teaching assistant position and offers a six-week summer language program for international students. Cornell offers an International Teaching Assistant Development program through its Center for Teaching Excellence.

These three University of Chicago programs—the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Writing Program, and the Summer English Language Institute—have little interaction and coordination with each other. Their relationship with departments and programs varies considerably. There is limited awareness of their offerings and capabilities among some departments, and their penetration among graduate students varies significantly depending on the academic program.

According to the directors of graduate studies with whom the Subcommittee met, some departments require their students to participate in various aspects of these programs, some recommend it, and others pay no attention at all to these centralized resources. The Physics Department, for example, offers its own orientation at the beginning of the year,

and this orientation is scheduled at the same time as the CTL's Fall Workshop on Teaching, so the department suggests students attend the CTL workshop in the fall of their second year, but few do. The History Department reports that its students do go to the CTL workshops, but they know to do this from other students and not as a requirement from the department, which has not focused on pedagogical training. The Music Department strongly encourages its students to attend CTL workshops, and the English Department uses the CTL for workshops and individual teaching consultations.

There are no centralized University-wide requirements for graduate students to undertake preparatory training as a condition of their being appointed to teaching positions in the University, and teaching assistant supervision is generally left up to individual faculty members. The College, the largest employer of graduate students in teaching positions, also does not have any unit-wide formal requirements for pedagogical preparation. Each collegiate division has its own process for hiring graduate student teachers and each oversees its own graduate student teachers. As previously indicated, some individual departments have pedagogy workshops and mentoring for their students before teaching, but these do not seem to be division-wide practices.

#### **IV. Goals and recommendations**

The Subcommittee believes strongly that training all graduate students in the skills necessary to be effective teachers should be an integral part of graduate education, and it should be a priority for maintaining the University's high academic standards for undergraduates.

##### **Goal #1: Create a campus culture that values high-quality graduate student teaching and recognizes the role of pedagogical training in producing high-quality graduate student teachers.**

The Subcommittee found in conversations with faculty, staff, and students that the focus on original research and scholarship in some departments often comes at the expense of any emphasis on or discussion of teaching. Students reported subtle and not-so-subtle messages from faculty members indicating that time spent teaching, and even more so, on efforts aimed at improving one's teaching skills, is wasted time.

Some graduate students may continue their careers at other research institutions with few or no teaching obligations, but such positions are limited. Many students will in fact need to be able to secure employment at smaller institutions that will require them to demonstrate teaching ability or at non-academic jobs that will require demonstrated organizational and communication skills. Training students to teach well arms them with transferable skills that will serve them well in their career searches. Devaluing teaching does a disservice to students as they prepare to go on the job market.

Although each division or school has ultimate responsibility (in cooperation with its academic departments and programs) for training its graduate students to be researchers, scholars, and teachers as it sees fit, the Subcommittee believes that the Office of the Provost can and should emphasize to the divisions and schools that the University considers pedagogical training an important part of a University of Chicago graduate education. The central administration should demonstrate this commitment to pedagogical training by providing and coordinating University-wide initiatives aimed at supporting departmental efforts in this regard.

## **Recommendations**

- 1A. Reorganize the current centralized resources (i.e., the CTL, the Writing Program, and possibly the SELI) under the Office of the Provost. Consider merging campus-wide teacher training opportunities as well as teacher training and mentoring evaluation into a new unit under the supervision of the Deputy Provost for Graduate Education or another dedicated administrator within the Office of the Provost. In addition to the programmatic benefits of integrated services, there may be economic advantages as well.
  - Establish clear guidelines for accountability and evaluation of all centralized programs.
  - Increase cooperation and integration among the University's teacher training programs.
  - Identify synergies and efficiencies among the programs.
  - Improve communication and marketing efforts so that administrators, faculty, and graduate students across all the academic units know about graduate student teacher training offerings and are in conversation with the training programs so that the programs can be adapted to meet changing needs.
- 1B. Evaluate the CTL, the Writing Program, and the SELI independently to guarantee that they are robust and effective programs and to ensure that the high academic standards that mark a University of Chicago education are being met. To change the campus culture, faculty and students must take seriously the teacher training programs.
  - Ensure that emphasis is placed on educating beginning teachers rather than credentialing job seekers who are in the advanced stages of their graduate education. Teacher training should proceed or be in tandem with early teaching opportunities.



- Adequately staff each program with credentialed experts in pedagogy. Identify and take advantage of existing campus resources (such as pedagogy experts who are part of the Urban Teacher Education Program) to enhance current programs.
  - Ensure that each program's offerings are relevant and adaptable to every discipline. There was concern expressed, for example, that the Writing Program lacks appropriate support for science writing and that the CTL does not support empirical subjects well, having little to offer students in the Economics Department and in Physical and Biological Sciences.
  - Develop and implement assessment measures for ongoing evaluation of each program's effectiveness.
  - Create a strategy and implementation plan for programmatic and communication improvements to current offerings that will improve faculty and student perceptions of pedagogical training. The communication plan should include creation of a dedicated and current website focused on pedagogical training for graduate students and junior faculty and should link to a job bank of campus teaching opportunities.
- 1C. Create forums and networks for departments to share best practices in pedagogical training. Some departments that have done very little teacher training could benefit from those departments with well-established teacher training programs, but they may not even know about them. As innovative teacher-training opportunities are developed, there should be systems in place for sharing ideas across departments and disciplines.

**Goal #2: Ensure graduate students have adequate preparation before undertaking any type of teaching position and adequate support and guidance during their teaching experience.**

Although the graduate students that met with the Subcommittee expressed general satisfaction with the *research* mentoring they received from faculty, only one of the graduate students felt mentored as a teacher. Students reported inconsistency across departments (and even across courses within the same department) regarding the level of preparedness students feel going into the class and the level of support given to graduate student teachers during their teaching assignments.

**Recommendations**

- 2A. Establish and enforce University-wide minimum requirements, separate from any departmental requirements that all graduate students must meet before taking teaching positions. These requirements should be connected to a certification (potentially available with Web-based components) that qualifies

students to teach at the University of Chicago. These requirements should include:

- Knowledge of basic pedagogical concepts and practices;
- Spoken English-language competency;
- Knowledge of professional ethics, including issues of confidentiality and unlawful harassment policies; and
- Awareness of University mental health and other crisis support services for students.

- 2B. Departments and the College should set up systems for ongoing supervision of new student teachers in their first and second teaching assignments.
- 2C. Require departments to develop teacher mentoring programs (perhaps in conjunction with academic research/scholarship advising and mentoring) with faculty or experienced graduate student teachers serving as teaching mentors to new graduate student teachers. Departments should routinely evaluate their efforts to supervise and mentor graduate student teachers.
- 2D. Create forums and networks for graduate students across departments and disciplines to share best practices and get advice from each other about teaching issues.