

Document 1: Teaching Preparation in your Doctoral Program.

The Catholic University of America School of Theology and Religious Studies

The School of Theology and Religious Studies Teaching and Learning Program is part of the STRS commitment to excellence in teaching on the part of all faculty as well as preparing future professors.

Teaching Assistantships and Teaching Fellowships are not considered part of financial aid or scholarships for graduate students but, rather, are an integral part of the program that develops future professors in the teaching aspect of their profession.

The STRS Teaching and Learning Program is open to all STRS graduate students, although Teaching Fellowships are reserved for those pursuing a doctoral degree. The first requirement of the program is to take TRS 550 Teaching & Learning in Theology & Religious Studies. This course is offered in both the Fall and Spring semesters.

Practicum Phase – Teaching Assistantships

After completing TRS 550, students are eligible for the practicum phase of the program wherein they will serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA) to a faculty member teaching an undergraduate TRS course. Normally, the first TA assignment would be in the Fall following completion of the course and attendance at the University-level 1-1/2 day orientation for all New TAs and TFs, conducted in August. Although MA students are not precluded from serving as TAs, priority for these positions is given to doctoral students

Graduate students may serve as a Teaching Assistant up to four times. TA assignments are determined by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies and are based on the graduate student's course schedule and, in the case of subsequent TA assignments, the logical next step in the graduate student's development. The assignment process often involves the Director of the STRS Teaching and Learning Program as well as the faculty member to whom the TA will be assigned.

The TA assignments provide TAs an opportunity to serve in a variety of courses, work with different members of the faculty, and have an opportunity to facilitate discussions as well as teach 1-2 class sessions in a semester-long course.

Lead Professors serve as mentors to TAs in their development as future professors. This mentoring relationship is addressed in detail in the STRS Faculty Mentoring Manual. An important part of the mentoring process is the formal TA evaluation completed by the Lead Professor at the end of each semester. A copy of the evaluation is provided to the TA and the evaluation is sent to the Director, STRS T&L Program. The Program Director will forward the evaluation to the Assistant Dean for inclusion in the student's file.

Teaching Fellowships

TAs can move to the next phase of the program path, that of Teaching Fellow, when they and the Lead Professors for whom they have served judge they are ready to teach a course on their own.

Normally, the first course is one within the graduate student's area of expertise. Since the mentoring relationship is critical in the development of future professors, all graduate student Teaching Fellows are to have a Faculty Mentor for every course they teach. After consulting their academic advisor and securing a faculty mentor, the prospective TF presents the proposed first course to their Academic Area Director for approval. Should a proposed course not be within a student's own academic area, the approval is granted by the Academic Area Director responsible for the course proposed.

As with TAs, Faculty Mentors complete a formal TF evaluation at the end of each semester. A copy of the evaluation is provided to the TF and the evaluation is sent to the Director, STRS T&L Program. The Program Director will forward the evaluation to the Assistant Dean for inclusion in the student's file.

FYE Teaching Fellowships

Once a TF has demonstrated teaching competence through teaching a TRS course they are competitive for a First-Year Experience Teaching Fellowship. The invitation to apply for the FYE Teaching Fellowship is sent by the Provost's Office to all graduate students each year. The TRS 201 Course Coordinators, along with the Director of the STRS T&L Program serve as the search committee for FYE TF position openings. This committee reviews applications and submits their recommendations to the Dean. In addition to having already demonstrated teaching abilities, preference is given to applicants who have finished their course work, taken their comprehensive exams and are in the dissertation proposal/writing phase.

Normally, FYE Teaching Fellowships are for two years, renewable after the first year. Consideration for extending an FYE Teaching Fellowship beyond two years, based solely on STRS needs for qualified instructors, requires the Search Committee's consultation with and approval by the student's dissertation director as the priority for STRS is for candidates to be making acceptable progress towards their doctoral degree.

In summary, the STRS Teaching & Learning Program that prepares graduate students in the teaching part of their profession follows the following sequence:

1. Complete TRS 550 Teaching & Learning (offered each Fall & Spring).
2. Notify the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies of availability to attend University-level New TA Orientation in August and desire to begin practicum phase of the program as a TA in the Fall.
3. Attend University-level New TA/TF Workshop (4th week in August, on the Monday & Tuesday before the start of Fall semester).
4. Serve as a Teaching Assistant for 2-4 courses. Teach a TRS course under the mentorship of a faculty member who has taught the same course.

Document 2: Summary of Findings from Teaching Initiative Work The Catholic University of America School of Theology and Religious Studies

The Consultant's Report on the Wabash Conference highlighted six goals for us:

1. Make the teacher-training component of our doctoral programs explicit.
2. Utilize alumni more as a source of feedback and a resource for what works in the field.
3. Create unified program of teacher training with built-in assessments.
4. Be more intentional in recruiting and training faculty members to be mentors. Make expectations explicit.
5. Involve the international students and globalize and diversify program.
6. Draw on expertise of other areas of the university

In addition, we would like to offer the following observations of things learned in the conversations.

1. While we position ourselves as members of a research university and attempt to train our doctoral students to be competent researchers, all of the participants had jobs in undergraduate institutions with heavy teaching loads or in seminaries. While we can certainly think of alumni who do work in top research institutions, we need to bear in mind that we are preparing many students for job interviews at places that will want to know how prepared they are to teach.

2. During the time that these students were in school here, the preparation we offered for a teaching career was very spotty. Not all of them had opportunities to take (what was then) TRS 751A or to serve as a teaching assistant or fellow. The format of our Teaching and Learning program changed several times over the last five years. The mentoring component seems to have been a constant, but the format of training sessions changed over time. At first we held luncheons with guest speakers (not all of whom were very helpful), later we instituted the teaching and learning course.

3. Faculty mentors are not always of high quality or highly-engaged. We should think about strategies such as (1) letting faculty with an interest in good teaching self-select into the mentoring program rather than defining it as a responsibility that everyone should shoulder, and (2) providing some training and a set of expectations for mentors (David's handbook is an excellent start).