

Summary of Findings from Graduate Student Teaching Initiatives Gathering

Drew Graduate Division of Religion

Virginia Burrus, October 7, 2012

Things we learned about our graduates :

Most of them work in institutional settings very different from our own, teaching undergraduates and carrying course loads of 3/3 or 4/4; teaching is much more valued than scholarship in most of their institutional settings; and most of them face the challenge of students who lack writing and critical thinking skills. They feel extremely well served by Drew with regard to course content, and their interdisciplinary studies prepare them to teach flexibly across disciplines. They also feel extremely well served with regard to their skill in the contextual analysis of power and difference, which carries over into course content and pedagogical method as well in their ability to analyze their own institutions. However, they do not feel that Drew prepared them adequately in the areas of syllabus composition, design and assessment of assignments, classroom management, or philosophy of teaching, etc. They valued their experiences as Teaching Assistants, though they felt this could have been enhanced by more support and more intentional mentoring (note that we did not yet have Teaching Assistant orientation, workshops, or Moodle site when most of them were TAs). Several also felt that work internships at Drew (e.g., with ESOL program) were as valuable as TA experiences in preparing them to teach. Most of the felt that adjunct teaching experiences at undergraduate colleges during the PhD studies were crucial to their preparedness and their marketability as teachers.

Suggestions for moving ahead:

- Give more preparation for the nitty gritty of teaching. **Support Drew faculty in becoming even more intentional about mentoring TAs, mindful of the teaching contexts in which they are likely to find themselves.** Structure the TA experience to maximize students' preparedness to meet the challenges of teaching—e.g., include them in discussion of course design, syllabus preparation, assignments and assessment, etc.; allow them some experience lecturing as well as leading discussions and grading. Continue to enrich the TA orientation and workshops.
- Circulate graduate students' c.v.'s and teaching competencies to local colleges each semester to facilitate their hiring as adjunct teachers.
- Develop the Moodle Teaching Resources site as a gathering place for sharing resources and conversation among faculty, alums, and current students.
- Bring alums back regularly, to discuss pedagogy and scholarship, but also as resources for current grad students. Early June is a good time for them.
- Continue to promote an interdisciplinary curriculum.
- Do even more to facilitate students serving as TAs across disciplines.
- Provide an opportunity for students to develop a teaching portfolio—syllabuses, philosophy of teaching, etc—not only for interviewing but also to equip them in their teaching appointments. Might a non-credit course be developed for students to take in their third or fourth year, offered every other year?

Teaching Preparation for PhD Students

Drew Graduate Division of Religion

Virginia Burrus, October 7, 2012

(1) **Teaching Assistantships** for required MDiv courses are the core of Drew's preparation of PhD students for teaching. We expect that all of our students will serve at least once as a Teaching Assistant, preferably twice or more. Typically a student serves as a TA for the first time in their second year of course work and at least once more during the subsequent semesters of comprehensive examination and dissertation work. In some disciplines, students are encouraged to audit the required course that is closest to their area of scholarly interest in their first year, in preparation for serving as a TA for that course the following year. After serving as a TA once or twice in their own field, they are encouraged to serve as TA in a different but related field. (For example, a New Testament and Early Christianity student would first serve as TA for the Introduction to New Testament and then, depending on their teaching goals, might subsequently serve as TA for Intro to the Hebrew Bible, for Intro to Ancient and Medieval Christianity, or for Intro to Preaching.)

Mentoring styles and TA duties vary. In most cases, a TA will have an initial conversation with their faculty teaching mentor about how the course is designed and what its goals are and will subsequently meet with their mentor weekly, at least during the first weeks of the semester. In the first year, TA duties typically include leading discussion groups and grading papers; some TAs may also give brief presentations as a first foray into lecturing. In subsequent semesters, we encourage faculty and students to structure the TA experience so that the student is able to take on new challenges, gaining practice, for example, in giving full-length lectures both on subjects that are very familiar to them and on ones that are not. TAs receive a stipend of \$2000 per semester course.

(2) **TA Orientation and Workshops** are offered each semester and are required for all students serving as TA during that semester. The orientation occurs shortly before the semester begins. It lasts five hours and covers the following topics: Teaching goals, objectives, and styles; Teaching to diverse and multi-cultural classrooms; Boundaries in the classroom; and University policies (Human Rights, Academic Integrity, FERPA). Workshops are held once a month during the semester. They last two hours and cover the following three topics: Assessing student work; Leading discussions (with focus on difficult topics); Lecturing and alternatives to lecturing. We try to make the Orientation and Workshops as "hands on" as possible. Orientation draws on faculty and staff with particular expertise on the relevant topics. Workshops are led by faculty members who are mentoring TAs in that particular semester. The GDR Chair not only plans but also attends and participates in orientations and workshops, lending some continuity as well as underlining the importance of these training events.

A Moodle site on Teaching Resources is maintained as a support and supplement for the Workshops.

(3) **Adjunct Teaching positions** are available in several local universities and colleges, and we try to encourage and facilitate our doctoral students' access to such positions. In this way they gain experience teaching their own courses and teaching undergrads, both of which are crucial.