

## Teaching Preparation at the Graduate Theological Union

A discussion of teaching preparation at The Graduate Theological Union (GTU) begins with our interfaith and interdisciplinary context. Nine Catholic, Protestant, and Unitarian seminaries join with institutes of Jewish, Buddhist, Islamic, and Orthodox studies as well as five research centers, all working collaboratively with the University of California, Berkeley, to provide a unique educational environment.

The discussion continues with our faculty. GTU faculty have published essays, articles, and books on effective teaching and learning including contributions to the Wabash journal, *Teaching Theology and Religion*; we include several among our faculty ranks with degrees in education. Over the years, these faculty and others have mentored their students one-on-one towards effective teaching.

The GTU does not require a teaching colloquy or other kind of class experience of all doctoral students. The GTU is organized around research or disciplinary “areas” and relies on areas to make available and/or require such opportunities. To support these sorts of decisions, the GTU allows students to focus one of their comprehensive examinations on teaching.

**Student-Taught Course as a Comprehensive:** The following guidelines must be followed if a student wishes to exercise this option. The course must be designed to require, and have evaluated, content and skills on the part of the student comparable to other examinations, with comparable faculty oversight and critical response.

- The student prepares a syllabus in consultation with a member of the comprehensive committee; the student’s presentation and written explanation of the syllabus must demonstrate that the scope and content of the sections of the course for which the student is responsible are appropriate as the academic content and scope of a comprehensive examination. The student’s explanation of the syllabus may include the extent of preparation for lectures and class sessions as well as the material actually presented, but the presentation must be specifically detailed in its demonstration of comparability. The syllabus must be approved by the entire comprehensive committee as satisfactory “as an examination”.
- The student teacher, prior to teaching the course, must also identify and label the academic content and lesson plan for each of the class sessions for which she/he is responsible. The student must be responsible for at least a majority of the class sessions; the academic content necessary for the preparation of each session must be substantial and comparable to a comprehensive examination. The criteria for evaluation of the mastery of the academic content needs to be clarified before the course is taught.
- One member of the committee normally attends each session for which the student teacher is responsible, and writes a critique of that session which is shared with the student and comprehensive exams committee. This is roughly equivalent to the reader of an examination sharing comments with other members of the committee.
- All members of the committee must see the syllabus, lesson plans and faculty observer’s comments before the oral comprehensive examination so that the content of the course may be discussed during that examination.

The specific areas below include information about teaching preparation in their respective area protocols:

**Biblical Studies:** Reflection on and practice of teaching are recommended for Biblical Studies students anticipating entering the teaching profession. Students are encouraged to take advantage of various opportunities available at the GTU or the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) to develop insights and gain experience in teaching. These include TA positions available in the various seminaries, Newhall Awards (see below), or other opportunities available through the Dean of Students office. Students are also encouraged to enroll in the IDS 6016 Seminar on Course Design and Syllabus Development. Those wishing to co-ordinate their teaching experience with a comprehensive exam may also consult with the area convener about a Special Reading Course involving introductions in both testaments to the field.

**Cultural and Historical Studies of Religion (CHSR):** CHSR students must develop an academic plan. The draft should include career goals reflecting on teaching, research, writing and/or social action/ministry. Students are also encouraged to imagine the kind of environment/institution in which they would like to work. The area protocol offers students a thought experiment: “If you are interested in teaching, make a list of courses you would want to teach. These courses should fit the sort of institution you designated and should primarily include those general courses for which you would be hired, and not the specialized interest courses you might be able to teach occasionally.”

*Student-Designed Course as a Comprehensive:* Called the “pedagogical comprehensive examination,” CHSR developed an alternative to actually teaching a course for a comprehensive exam that other areas are allowed to emulate. This examination consists of developing a full syllabus, with requirements, expectations, evaluation criteria, goals and objectives clearly identified, along with a list of readings. The syllabus is accompanied by a 10-20 page paper explaining the intellectual approach of the course and specifying the decisions made about both content and teaching approach. A student may choose to actually teach the course, but this is not required. Students taking this comprehensive exam must take IDS 6016 in order to get substantial critical feedback on their syllabus.

**Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS):** IDS students can use one of their comprehensive examinations to prepare for teaching. Like CHSR, this examination requires the student to prepare a full syllabus with clearly defined objectives, requirements, expectations, evaluation criteria, and a reading list for an **introductory course with no prerequisites**. The course can be an introductory course in the student’s religious tradition or culture of specialization, an introduction to the study of religion, a course on world religions, or an introductory course whose scope is broader than the student’s religious tradition or culture of specialization. The comprehensive exam includes a 15-20 page paper describing the intellectual approach of the course and specifying the decisions made about both content and instruction. The paper bibliography includes literature on pedagogy as well as on the topic of the course. Students are required to take the IDS 6016 Seminar as a context in which to develop this syllabus.

**Liturgical Studies:** Finally, Liturgical Studies allows students to frame one exam as two essays that demonstrate the integration of the students’ areas of expertise. Each paper is approximately 30 pages in length. At least one of these essays must include the student’s related discipline(s). One of the papers may be a syllabus for a course as described in the Doctoral Program Handbook (see above, i.e. “Student Designed Course as a Comprehensive”) with the added stipulation that the syllabus be accompanied by a 20 page (minimum) paper which includes a critical evaluation of the resources in the course bibliography. These

essays demonstrate a student's ability to work within the interdisciplinarity of Liturgical Studies as well as to integrate methods/insights of related disciplines in pursuit of a specific research topic.

The GTU also does not require all doctoral students to show evidence of teaching experience gained while in the program. However, we have an endowment that supports "Newhall Awards," competitive awards for GTU doctoral students who wish to engage in collaborative teaching or research with a faculty mentor. Awards are given for fall, spring or both semesters, but the application process takes place only in the Fall. Generally, awards are at least \$3000 per semester. The design of the project should require the student to spend only about 5 - 10 hours per week. Newhall applications must come from both the student and the professor for a project involving both of them. The awards are designed to support both students (through grants) and faculty (through offering assistance to their research and teaching).

When students submit a proposal for Newhall Awards, the following items should be included and issues should be addressed.

- For Research Assistants: specific content of research and its end goal
- For Teaching Assistants: specific information on course content, learning outcomes and student's role
- For students teaching courses under faculty mentorship: a draft syllabus with course description, student learning outcomes, reading assignments, assessment methods, and outline of class sessions
- A substantial letter of recommendation from the faculty mentor outlining the student's excellence in study and qualifications for teaching or research
- Suitability of proposed project for advancing the student's professional development
- Record of the faculty member's involvement in doctoral program or consortial-wide cooperative teaching and research
- How the project enhances the goals of the consortium in promoting excellence in research and teaching among faculty and students

The GTU includes a co-curricular approach to teaching preparation to reach all students. In the late 1980s, the Academic Dean's Office began offering formal extracurricular workshops on various career-related themes, some of which focused on effective teaching. In 1995, Dr. Judith Berling offered the first annual doctoral seminar on course design and teaching strategies that remains popular today (aka IDS 6016 Seminar on Course Design and Syllabus Development) The Professional Development Program (PDP) was developed by the Dean of Students in 2003 as an outgrowth of the Dean's efforts, making doctoral student teaching preparation more systematic and strategic.

We have use grants focused on particular themes to augment our PDP efforts. Grants from the Wabash Center and the American Academy of Religion (AAR) funded two PDP workshops. In 2006, Wabash granted funds for the GTU Preparing Future Faculty project (PFF), implemented in 2007-2008, which piloted a more comprehensive teaching preparation program for doctoral student cohorts grounded in experiential learning that integrated pedagogical theory and classroom teaching. Project participants, including two

doctoral fellows, presented our program at the November, 2008 AAR annual meeting and the Summer, 2009 edition of the AAR journal, *Religion and Education* published those presentations.

We also encourage students to take advantage of the UCB Center for Teaching and Learning and all their rich resources and offerings, available to all GTU students.

We envision re-framing our Professional Development Program using Lee Shulman's notion of orienting doctoral students about the "practices of the Ph.D.," and, in our case, the Th.D. We are re-structuring the PDP around: the practices of scholarship, teaching, supervision and mentoring, and public service. (Lee S. Shulman, "Doctoral Education Shouldn't Be a Marathon" *The Chronicle of Higher Education-The Chronicle Review*, section B; April 9, 2010) Diversity will be the one consistent lens through which doctoral students will engage these practices. This approach will help us frame "GTU's brand" of teaching practices.

In the fall, 2012 the PDP will launch a multi-faceted teaching preparation plan. Students will be encouraged to complete the following steps:

- Year 1: attend the "how to teach" conference offered at UCB every August and January, designed for UCB graduate students, but open to GTU students, and including a teaching certificate.
- Year 2: apply for a Newhall award.
- Year 2, spring: attend a half day Newhall workshop including lunch with the GTU Sarlo Teacher of the Year where the professor shares his/her own best practices and offers tips and strategies, a panel discussion with prior Newhall award recipients, and breakout sessions among current Newhall awardees, with prior recipients and the Sarlo professor, to discuss concerns and answer questions about teaching preparation and practice.
- Year 3: complete the Newhall assignment; attend the Newhall workshop in the spring as a returning Newhall recipient
- Year 4, fall: attend a two day Teaching Portfolio workshop and use the Newhall experience to begin construction of their portfolio

We have developed and plan to incorporate a best practices for mentoring section in the doctoral faculty handbook that will include information about teaching support and preparation. We plan to send something similar about student best practices in mentoring to students in our doctoral program, every semester. The GTU Academic Dean will teach a course on MA thesis methodology each year beginning this spring and will invite doctoral students to give guest presentations, then, serve as a buddy to students in the class, serving as another mechanism for developing mentoring.

We believe our doctoral graduates could have an advantage in the job market with a strong background in teaching preparation. We also believe, in a climate of limited teaching opportunities, it is essential to explore how the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained and developed during doctoral study can transfer across different jobs, professions and careers. As such, what we learn from the Graduate Programs Teaching Initiative will help us enhance doctoral student employability which, in this present economy, couldn't be more important.

## Graduate Theological Union

### Findings for April 2012 Summative Conference

December 1, 2011

The Dean of Students Office collaborated with the Academic Dean to apply for a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion for 2010-2011. The purpose of the Graduate Programs Teaching Initiative is to help doctoral programs assess their preparation of Ph.D. and Th.D. students for teaching appointments.

Our grant proposal reflected a discrete set of questions: What role do and should the GTU doctoral program areas play in teaching preparation? Who are the “critical actors” in GTU teaching preparation? What are the essential elements of a teaching preparation program? Should there be established benchmarks that future faculty strive for in preparing to teach?

Our proposal was grounded in the belief that our doctoral graduates could have an advantage in the job market because of our emphasis and work on teaching preparation. We also believe, in a climate of limited teaching opportunities, it is essential to explore how the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained and developed during doctoral study can transfer across different jobs, professions and careers. The Wabash Center asked us to focus this Initiative specifically on teacher preparation, but allowed us to explore a variety of teaching contexts including tenure/tenure-track, multiple adjunct assignments, and part time work that supplements a career in another field or venue.

We were awarded the grant in May, 2010 and worked on planning for our event during the fall, 2010 semester. The GTU “Graduate Program Teaching Initiative” planning team included Deena Aranoff, Assistant Professor of Medieval Jewish Studies at the Center for Jewish Studies here at GTU, Arthur Holder, GTU Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs and John Dillenberger Professor of Christian Spirituality, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Associate Professor of Church History, CDSP, Kathleen Kook, GTU Associate Dean of Admissions and adjunct professor, and me. We worked on this project with our Wabash consultant, Frank Yamada, who at the time was Professor of Hebrew Bible and Director of the Center for Asian American Ministries at McCormick Theological Seminary (but, who will be inaugurated as McCormick’s 10<sup>th</sup> president on February 8, 2012).

On March 10 and 11, 2011 we used the \$15000 grant to bring back ten doctoral alumna/e, who had graduated five years ago and have been teaching a substantial time since, to help us assess our preparation of Ph.D. and Th.D. students for teaching appointments. Participants stayed overnight in Easton Hall and ate their meals in the PSR dining center. After an opening plenary session with Judith Berling, professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions at GTU, on “Preparing Our Future Faculty: the GTU Context; What’s At Stake?” we had four discussion periods each focusing on the following themes: teaching preparation in the GTU classroom, teaching preparation in the graduate’s current school’s classroom, mentoring to prepare students for teaching, and teaching preparation outside the GTU classroom. Two or three different graduates prepared a brief presentation for each session to help frame the discussion. We ended our second day together in working groups where the graduates used what they had learned during the project to “inform/transform GTU teaching preparation” and provide us with recommendations.

The design team and Wabash consultants heard some very helpful reflections including lots for us to celebrate: the importance of faculty as mentors and role models, the value of teaching assistantships and

Newhall fellowships, and enthusiastic appreciation for Judith Berling's renowned seminar in course design. We also heard about things we need to work harder on: encouraging students to take advantage of the option to teach a course as a form of comprehensive exam, developing relationships with Bay Area colleges and universities who need TA's and adjunct instructors, and reminding doctoral program areas that area meetings can provide significant opportunities for professional development.

We were able to draft preliminary benchmarks that future faculty would strive for in preparing to teach, something one might call some "signature traits" of our GTU doctoral alums. We learned that they are **entrepreneurs** who have discovered how to present their professional qualifications, envision innovative programs, and write successful grant proposals. They are **caring teachers** who love their students and attend to each student's individual background and aspirations. And, they are **skilled readers of institutional cultures** who know how to adapt their teaching style to fit with a school's particular mission and context. As we like to say, they are **rigorous thinkers and passionate doers**.

We plan to work with the Faculty Council, and the doctoral program's Professional Development Program to use these signature traits to help frame student success outcomes for all our doctoral students (and, include them as a part of our Equity Scorecard). And, the project reflections will serve as a source for identifying, prioritizing and developing new and improved strategies to achieve the outcomes.

We are already working with GTU alumni/ae at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA, several of whom are in academic leadership positions there, on a formal arrangement with the College where GTU students interested in college level teaching could gain experience by assisting SMC faculty.