

Teaching and Learning Preparation in the Graduate Division of Religion of the Laney Graduate  
School of Emory University

The Teaching and Learning Preparation Program of the GDR reflects a Laney Graduate School Initiative called TATTO. Existing since 1991, TATTO is a required component of graduate education, which has undergone continual assessment. Currently, it consists of the following components: 1) provides a book on teaching to incoming graduate students; 2) requires each incoming graduate student to participate in a multi-day, Laney School-wide seminar on teaching and learning; 3) requires each graduate student to participate in two teaching assistantships and one teaching associateship (the parameters of this can differ among programs); 4) requires teaching evaluations. In addition to these basic requirements, the GDR embraced TATTO with Chuck Foster of Candler School of Theology playing a key role in the origins of the program design. TATTO in the GDR has added components to the Laney requirements: 1) provides a seminar on teaching and learning religion; 2) offers workshops to supplement TATTO (GDR faculty teach in both phrases); 3) requires graduate students reflect on their teaching with their supervisors and their teaching evaluations are kept on file collects teaching evaluations of graduate students' teaching.

The GDR views TATTO are more than "teacher training". As an integral part of a student's professional development, GDR faculty approach TATTO as mentoring and advising. Formal structures ensure that students move progressively through the TATTO program so that incremental instruction and advising can occur in conjunction with accumulated experience in the classroom. TATTO in the GDR allows students to experience multiple connections between creative, productive research and imaginative, effective teaching. By the time GDR students graduate, many have had teaching practice in two different educational contexts: an undergraduate department of religion (and sometimes in other departments) in a liberal arts college, and a denominational school of theology. As Teaching Assistants, graduate students learn basic tasks and skills of the classroom. As Teaching Associates, graduate students closely collaborate with a Professor in designing and teaching a course. A number of students will have

had a chance to teach their own course solo in either the Department of Religion or Candler by the time they graduate.

Students in the GDR TATTO experience have identified the following aspects of our training as significant: experiences of micro-teaching, workshops on diversity, sustainability, theory; variety within their assistantships and associateships; learning about course design in the seminar and, some basic introduction to beginning a teaching portfolio. They also appreciated the numbers of faculty committed to and speaking about their teaching and learning. The GDR's program is designed to provide a culture of conversation about teaching with and among graduate students. Built around cohorts, the program naturally offers area-related focus along with interdisciplinary reach. Because everyone in the second year class takes the GDR seminar on teaching and learning, students in different fields benefit from a comparative perspective on teaching. The required elements, assistantship, associateship, independently taught course, provide a scaffold of experiences and feedback about teaching and learning in Religious Studies. This design not only contributes to students' developing a sense of their own authority as teachers, but also strengthens a critical mass of Professors capable of mentoring teaching and learning as part of the craft of intellectual life and research.

## Summary of Findings after our Graduate Program Teaching Initiative Weekend

During our two day discussions, common themes emerged, including:

- The extent to which the Emory TATTO program highlighted and validated teaching preparation as part of graduate education in theology and religion. The common TATTO requirement conveys the reality of teaching as a “craft” that professors practice
- The importance of the cohort model of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year TATTO seminar requirement in creating a culture of conversation about teaching among graduate students
- The capacity of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year TATTO seminar to introduce languages about pedagogy and education, including attention to the realities of diverse modes of student learning (the opportunity to write a teaching philosophy was frequently mentioned as an important benefit of this seminar).
- The capacity of the 3 TATTO teaching requirements (2 assistantships and 1 associateship) to link some of the material in the TATTO seminars with actual experience in teaching.
- The value of a culture of talking about teaching and doing peer problem solving for strengthening a capacity to reflect on and make incremental change in one’s practice. As one participant said, the TATTO experience had begun to form a “way of looking,” that is, an ongoing sense of pedagogical practices.
- The importance of formal and informal mentoring by faculty (although the GDR faculty capacities for such work varied).
- The range of training and support for developing teaching skills across courses of study by field and over time in the evolution of the GDR. The quality of this support is linked to the interdisciplinary nature of overall doctoral training at Emory (although a few participants noted that some aspects of the interdisciplinary training made it harder for them to “explain themselves” in more traditional religious or theological studies contexts).

While TATTO creates significant base points for teaching and learning, graduates noted challenges that remained: students far less equipped than Emory college undergrads (this was not a complaint from those who had taught Candler M.Divs.), being asked to teach a variety of courses for which they had no background training, juggling innumerable demands, etc. Noting these difficulties, participants spoke of the excitement they derived from teaching completely new material and/or teaching in completely new ways (particularly with technology). There was enthusiasm expressed for continuing these conversations in some way beyond this weekend.

There are a variety of elements of the program that could be strengthened:

1. Increased diversity of teaching experiences offered (e.g., college, seminary, and perhaps others), including more opportunities for solo teaching with some form of mentoring support
2. More opportunities for learning/discussing elements of teaching beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> year seminar—indeed possibly even beyond graduation
3. Formation of GDR faculty as teaching mentors and more shared pedagogical conversations and training involving current faculty and students (undergraduates and Candler students)
4. Attention to mapping the fields of religious and theological studies and mapping interdisciplinary capacities so that graduates can more easily name their competencies in ways that can be better understood by departments of religion and seminaries.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Emory's TATTO program must prepare for the evolving and fluid environments requiring pedagogical expertise. How will we prepare our students to succeed amid ongoing classroom design changes, innovative uses of media and technology, and applications of pedagogical approaches beyond the campus (business, research centers, government, etc.)?

Tomorrow's Ph.D.'s must have flexible skills capable of integrating aspects of different pedagogies relevant to presenting teaching contexts and problems. Our training must develop competencies for jobs within the academy and beyond.

Specific TATTO curricular areas requiring more development:

1. Psychological and developmental dimensions of human learning and teaching
2. Assessment design, implementation, and reporting
3. Interrelationships of pedagogical philosophy and curricular planning
4. Teaching Planning: syllabi, extended inquiry-driven courses, cross-university courses
5. Development of media-based resources including videos of current students' teaching (with permission) demonstrations of "lessons learned", "typical issues", "community-partnered exercises", etc. – in dialogue with mentoring groups (perhaps peer-led building on our previous grant with Wabash)
6. Consider a program of continuing professional support – perhaps developing a blog of shared experiences, tips, negotiated changes, etc. among our graduates