

Teaching Preparation in the PhD Program at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Ever since its beginning as a joint program with Northwestern University in the 1920s, the PhD program has considered teaching as a cherished vocational goal for our students, along with research and leadership in the church. The program has regularly placed 50-60% of our graduates in theological school and undergraduate college teaching positions. The separation from Northwestern University in the mid 1990s grew largely out of the university's program orientation that prepares persons for teaching at elite universities. Garrett-Evangelical positively affirmed the practical dimension of its program, while remaining committed also to scholarly rigor. In the fall of 1999, Garrett-Evangelical inaugurated a Doctor of Philosophy degree program independent of Northwestern while maintaining strong relationships with the University and its academic resources.

Teaching Seminar

A key feature of the Garrett program from its inception has been the requirement that all students participate in a highly-regarded intensive January seminar in teaching, usually during their first year. This course has been taught for many years by Dr. Jack Seymour, Christian educator and Wabash consultant, and is required before students are eligible to serve as teaching assistants. The goals for that course include:

1. Reflection on the teaching of theology and religion with disciplinary and class colleagues and faculty in theological education.
2. Initial preparation for serving as a teaching assistant at Garrett-Evangelical (and for contracting with a faculty member in one's field to serve as a teaching mentor).
3. Initial preparation of a teaching portfolio to use in searching for a position teaching in colleges or theological education.

Topics covered in the course include the vocation of teaching, organizing for the practice of teaching, pedagogy, learning styles, ethics of teaching, theological education, developing critical thinking skills, and integrating teaching and scholarship. In addition to observing other classrooms, students make teaching presentations in the class. Faculty panels offer students the chance to hear experienced teachers talk about their own vocation and developing pedagogical approaches.

Teaching Assistants

A number of teaching assistant positions are regularly available, and while participation is not required, it is increasingly expected of all students. As noted in

our PhD handbook (pp. 17-18)

“the primary purpose of the TA program is to assist PhD students to develop teaching practices in their academic disciplines. TAs are expected to contribute to the quality of teaching and learning during and outside classes as arranged with faculty, generally through the following:

- occasional class presentations (when TA service is in one’s discipline, a minimum of leadership of one class session is expected; faculty provide an evaluation of this work),
- leading discussion groups and review sessions
- monitoring and responding to online discussions ,
- tutoring for students,
- reading and grading assignments (the faculty member is responsible for final grade), and
- supervising field assignments, etc.

In addition to attending the class, TAs are expected to provide approximately 4-5 hours per week of assistance to the faculty member or 40-65 hours per semester. A second purpose of the TA program is to assist faculty with pedagogical needs in courses, while, at the same time, continuing the development of the teaching practices of PhD students.

Under the supervision of the academic dean, the PhD director administers the assistantships. The director consults with faculty about needs, with students about interests, and with the instructor of the PhD teaching course. After consultation, students are placed with faculty members by the director of the PhD program. Faculty members are expected to provide supervision, guidance and instruction for the TAs with whom they are working. Furthermore, at the end of the TA experience, they provide an evaluation of the student’s teaching and areas of growth.”

A stipend is provided as well as an allowance for books purchased for the course. This stipend is treated as additional scholarship assistance. The stipend is approved by the PhD director only after a satisfactory evaluation by the supervising instructor.

There is currently no formal orientation for supervising faculty, coordination of expectations concerning TA responsibilities or faculty evaluation of teaching, or concurrent consultation on teaching methods beyond that provided by the supervising faculty member. Our consultation noted considerable variation in faculty attention to mentoring, evaluation and discussion of pedagogical methods, and preparation of PhD students for future teaching positions, though faculty clearly have these goals in mind. The PhD committee is considering implementation of more regular consultation with supervising faculty, and implementation of a concurrent “laboratory” experience for teaching assistants, required at minimum during their first TA experience.

Document 2: Summary of Findings from Teaching Initiative Work

Findings from this consultation confirmed many of the faculty's perceptions about the program, highlighted others, and brought to light several additional observations.

- a. Graduates expressed deep appreciation for the *teaching seminar*. These comments included exposure to a variety of teaching methods, professional development as teachers, increased awareness of the changing landscape of theological education, and developing identities as educators (deepened by increased observation of the pedagogical practices of current faculty.) In addition, they noted the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of this seminar, as well as several others in the program.
- b. Other teaching experiences received mixed reviews. Some noted that their activities were limited to copying class materials, keeping attendance, and grading papers, with limited opportunity to lecture, lead group discussions, etc. On the other hand, many reported deeply formative TA experiences, reporting, for instance, that they "felt like a co-teacher." Particular practices that supported teacher formation included grading papers which were then reviewed by the instructor with comments, talking with the instructor about their rationale for particular interventions, reviewing positive and negative class interactions, and troubleshooting teaching encounters.
- c. Consistent comments suggest that our preparation of graduate students for *emerging technologies* is inadequate. While this is one area the program has already taken some steps to address (e.g., TA experiences each semester include on-line courses, and two-day workshops are regularly offered in digital learning for graduate students), it continues to be an area of critical development. We do plan to explore the possibility of including in the degree requirements the completion of a four-course certification from the UW Madison program on digital learning.
- d. Our preparation of PhD students to teach in *other cultural contexts* is limited. While the institution's long-standing commitments to the Black Church have provided opportunities and settings for critical reflection on teaching in other than European-descent models, our Korean graduates noted their need to deconstruct pedagogical approaches they had learned here and re-

construct models that were more culturally congruent and educationally effective on their return to Korea.

- e. While adjunct teachers often appreciate the balance of academic teaching with congregational leadership, they noted the need to continue their *research and scholarship* in ways that would support their status and credibility with other teaching colleagues. They noted again the need for institutions of theological education to acknowledge the multiple contexts of teaching, including parish, agency, and particularly community.
- f. Graduates also voiced concern for more direct assistance in *professional development*, including articulating their own philosophies of education in job interviews, reading the institutional contexts they would enter, assessing power dynamics in theological institutions, classroom management with a particular focus on plagiarism and holding students accountable for course assignments, and expectations about management of boundaries (e.g., with colleagues, students, administrators, board).
- g. Graduates, particularly those serving in undergraduate settings, are often called on to *teach in areas for which they were not prepared* in graduate school. We need to consider how we can help students develop the capacity to engage other areas of scholarly interest and develop appropriate, effective methods for teaching, as well as recognize the limits of their own training and ability.

Our findings from this gathering, combined with earlier observations, suggest a number of avenues for further evaluation, planning, and implementation:

- a. Continuation of the teaching seminar for all students in the program. This should remain a requirement for TA experiences, as well as for recommendations for teaching in other settings.
- b. Reaffirm expectation (or consider requiring) that graduate students will participate in at least one TA experience, with a strong recommendation for two or three such opportunities. Where students can extend themselves to teach in a cognate area, they may well develop more nuanced approaches to pedagogy, particularly if they participate in additional consultation (see c. below.)

- c. Need for *clearer criteria for faculty colleagues* concerning the expected dimensions of a TA experience, for the graduate student. These criteria should include attention to issues such as expectations for class leadership (lecture, group discussion, etc.), feedback on the student's performance as a TA, conversations about pedagogical strategies, assessment of the TA's evaluation of student learning (e.g., grades, outcomes, etc.), and conversation about the development of course syllabi.
- d. Greater support for *on-going teacher formation* is critical. We need to consider a required (or at least highly recommended) consultation group for students participating in their first (or more) TA experience, perhaps staffed by faculty colleagues in Religious Education, and/or perhaps from the Northwestern School of Education and Social Policy.
- e. Need for a *broader range of teaching experiences* beyond Teaching Assistant. This need is due to the limited number of TA opportunities each year, the primary context of these experiences in large, introductory classes where the additional instruction is justified, and the lack of opportunities for graduate students to construct and teach courses on their own. A regular network of institutions in the Chicago area would make such opportunities more visible. Examples might include: undergraduate institutions, particularly those that are church-related, teaching opportunities in congregations (e.g., lay academies), Course of Study programs at Garrett and elsewhere.
- f. Review current teaching and research practices in light of the *increasing globalization* of theological education. We need more data on the transferability of teaching formation from U.S. contexts to other cultural settings. Our current PhD student population includes Korean, Malaysian, Japanese-American, Latino/Latina, Eastern European and indigenous North American groups. We need to assess the feasibility of adapting programs for more effective preparation and transition.
- g. On-going *attention to professional formation* as teacher/scholars. Providing more intentional support for job applications, participation in scholarly guilds, entering new work contexts, balancing institutional expectations with family, church, other employment, etc. could help students both in job searches and in acclimating to new work settings. Given the importance of

on-line learning noted above, we need to seek ways to incorporate more intentional preparation for teaching and learning with emerging technologies.