

**Summary of Findings from Teaching Initiative work at Indiana University
Report prepared for Wabash summative conference, March 2014
By Aaron Stalnaker (Director of Graduate Studies, Religious Studies Dept.)**

We found the teaching initiative work to be very fruitful. Several points stand out. Most notably, we discovered a fairly deep disconnect between a widespread faculty orientation to working in a research university setting as the norm and goal for everyone, and our students' more prevalent expectation and hope to work in more teaching-intensive liberal arts colleges. Indeed, several of our returning students confessed that they had chosen IU in part because of the amount and character of the teaching that graduate students do. This has provoked something of a gestalt switch for the faculty as we reflect on how we train our doctoral students to teach, and inspired us to focus on this aspect of our graduate training much more attentively.

Second, it is clear that we as faculty have in the past very much gone our own ways in terms of mentoring graduate students. This has produced varying results, and we have begun to talk much more seriously about how we might more effectively mentor them as teachers, especially in the overwhelmingly prominent AI role. The goal here is not so much to police faculty behavior as to share ideas and simply make time to set appropriately high expectations for this aspect of our work. Figuring out when to have students lecture in a course, involving them in course design questions before, during, and after the semester, and sharing ideas about assignment design all seem ripe for further analysis and creative development.

Third, we have begun to think more holistically about the overall arc of teaching preparation in the graduate program. We aim to be more intentional about the sequencing of tasks and feedback for students, to help them assimilate skills and ideas more fully and effectively over time, so that they are ready to speak intelligently about teaching on the job market, and perform well from day one as faculty.

Fourth, we have been thinking in the same vein about professionalization of graduate students more generally, and reflecting on how pedagogical training fits into this overall program goal.

Teaching preparation in Indiana University's doctoral program
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By Aaron Stalnaker (Director of Graduate Studies, Religious Studies Dept.)

For better and for worse, teaching is an integral part of graduate instruction at Indiana University. Through working with Wabash Center on this grant, we have come to realize this "feature" of our program is not a "bug," but a real strength, albeit one that could still be refined.

All of our doctoral students serve as "associate instructors" (equivalent to "teaching assistants") working with faculty in lecture-discussion courses where the grad students lead discussion sections and grade assignments. Most begin the program with one year of fellowship of support, after which they spend four years working as AIs. The Director of Graduate Studies assigns the various graduate students to the various AI positions each semester. There is some variation in the difficulty of these assignments, and so the DGS often attempts to slot inexperienced teachers into the easiest slots, and/or those closest to their own areas of expertise, to avoid excessive anxiety and preparation overload. Over time, students will serve as AIs for several different courses and professors, in order to expose them to a variety of teaching styles and ways of constructing a course. We happily assign more experienced teachers to courses far outside their area at times, to prepare them for similar assignments that often come their way at smaller colleges; we also think this is intellectually valuable for rising Religious Studies scholars, to help them grapple with the challenges of explaining what they care about to those who know and care little about it, and to listen as a beginner, more or less, to various faculty members as they attempt to introduce their areas of RS and make their questions and problems vivid for a general student audience. But this is partly making a virtue of necessity, at least occasionally, because student course schedules trump every other consideration in cases of schedule conflicts, although this rarely deforms things very far.

In a single semester, AIs typically are responsible for 3 sections of 25 students if there are discussion sections, or three "sections" of 30 students each if there are no discussion sections. In all cases they are responsible for grading their assigned students' assignments.

AIs are mentored primarily by the faculty teaching the course which they assist. Although we as a faculty consult periodically about how best to do this, there is effectively very little oversight of this process, and individual faculty are free to do what they think best to mentor their AIs.

After being admitted to candidacy, doctoral students may teach their own courses, often beginning with summer session versions of courses for which they have served as AIs. They apply to the DGS to teach an introductory course in their area of expertise; six people do this each summer, typically. There are occasional opportunities to teach a "second eight weeks" version of these courses during the school year as well, depending on faculty research leaves, funding levels, and curricular needs. We have recently created a teaching excellence committee to oversee these grad student efforts, in order to, for example, help vet draft syllabi and audit class meetings.

We also require students to complete a teaching practicum before taking doctoral exams, for which they construct a full syllabus for a course in their area of study, under

the supervision of a faculty member. And all students who teach in any capacity participate in a workshop on teaching at the start of each academic year, which is led by the director of graduate studies for the department.

IU hosts a vibrant Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning that supports reflection on best practices in pedagogy, research into innovative forms of teaching, and also offers numerous teacher training workshops for faculty and graduate students; the department requires novice AIs to attend three of these at the start of their first semester teaching. CITL also offers a variety of services to both faculty and graduate student teachers, such as videotaping lectures, auditing course meetings, and consultations of various sorts to help improve people's skills. Highly motivated graduate students take advantage of these offerings, but the department only encourages this; we do not require it.