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GTA PREPARATION FOR TEACHING

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Two initiatives on GTA preparation for teaching underway this year

As at many other institutions, graduate teaching assistants at KU work in a wide variety of roles. In introductory courses, GTAs play an important role as assistants, and so are partners with faculty in ensuring learning for incoming students. Other responsibilities include leading discussion sections, conducting lab or studio sessions, preparing and delivering lectures, grading student assignments and exams, and meeting individually with students.

The number of GTAs in departments varies widely, as well. In fall 2006, the number ranged from one to 67.

Department-level preparation for teaching varies accordingly, with most large departments offering some type of formal, centralized program and most small departments offering less formal programs. Before the start of the academic year, many departments hold an orientation or workshop for new GTAs. Several departments require new GTAs to enroll in a preparatory course. Many departments have a formal mentoring program for GTAs or expect GTAs to meet regularly with faculty teaching advisors. Some departments also have a formal system for observing GTAs’ teaching.

CTE is coordinating the second initiative, a three-hour graduate course offered spring 2008 as LA&S 792: Being an Effective College Instructor. The course is modeled on a collaborative one developed last fall; see page 6. According to Dan Bernstein, CTE director and lead instructor of 792, key benefits to students will be a teaching practicum and development of a teaching portfolio based on their practicum. “Graduate students will make visible their personal inquiry into the learning their work has generated,” stated Bernstein.

For more information about LA&S 792, see page 2 or see CTE’s website, www.cte.ku.edu.
New graduate course, “Being a College Instructor” offered

Dan Bernstein, CTE

There are many reasons that graduate students want to be prepared for teaching. At one level is self-preservation; GTAs want to facilitate a planned, intentional class session that will sustain a continuous flow of coherent learning activities. Academic departments and leaders also have an interest in assuring some threshold of teaching skill, as they have assured students that course experiences are academically valuable.

At another level, both departments and teachers would like GTAs to make significant contributions to achievement of course and curricular goals. In the best case, university work is very challenging to students, and all the resources offered should make real contributions to learning. GTAs are part of our instructional teams so that learning can be optimal, even in large classes or in labor intensive studios, labs or practica.

For many graduate students, teaching will be a significant part of their professional lives. Reaching a level of excellence in teaching can be a huge asset in seeking academic employment and in making progress as a professor. Increasingly, teachers are expected to be aware of how and why they teach (not just what they teach), and it can be an advantage to represent an intellectual inquiry into student learning alongside inquiry into subject matter. A large majority of KU doctoral students take positions that include a substantial amount of teaching. A study completed a few years ago by the Graduate School revealed that only about ten percent find academic jobs in which research performance trumps the quality of teaching. Graduate students may want to explore how different teaching opportunities might fit into their lives and careers.

Brief orientation programs can do what is needed to get new GTAs ready for their first few class sessions. The New GTA Conference and department GTA orientations provide sufficient guidance to get going in an orderly fashion. Some departments also offer or require a graduate course in teaching that carries this introduction further; students read about teaching in their field and discuss issues they face in planning and carrying out course goals. In the best case, mentoring by a teaching advisor accomplishes some of this development, though these experiences typically focus on immediate practice and do not include reading about teaching.

In spring 2008 CTE will offer a graduate course for students who would like to explore their own teaching in depth.

In spring 2008 CTE will offer a graduate course for students who would like to explore their own teaching in more depth than is typically available through resources within their department. Offered as LA&S 792, “Being an Effective College Instructor” will provide students with hands on experience in many components of college teaching. Students will select course goals and materials, design assignments to capture the understanding they value, deliver instruction in a practicum setting, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction by looking at student performance. These experiences will be guided by reading portfolios created by KU faculty members and by reading from contemporary literature in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Each graduate student will represent her or his teaching by creating an electronic portfolio. This will make visible students’ personal inquiry into the learning their work has generated. In addition, students will discuss the place of teaching in their careers. Through readings about the lives of teachers and the larger world of scholarship, the class will provide graduate students an opportunity to think proactively about their worklife goals.

More information about LA&S 792 can be found on CTE’s website at www.cte.ku.edu.
Spanish and Portuguese honored at Teaching Summit

At the KU Teaching Summit on August 14, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese was recognized as the recipient of CTE’s 2007 Departmental Award for Exceptional Teaching and Learning. Vicky Unruh, chair, accepted the award on behalf of the department.

When naming Spanish and Portuguese, CTE’s advisory board emphasized that the department has demonstrated a deep commitment to learning, from undergraduate students completing a foreign language requirement through doctoral students preparing to be professors. Faculty members established clear goals for student learning and a system for reflecting on those goals. Board members noted the use of student portfolios to evaluate learning and the department’s impact on the Lawrence community through service learning.

CTE considers three areas to distinguish the recipient of this $10,000 award:
• Establishing a culture of learning focused on innovation and collaboration;
• Systematic reflection on goals for student learning;
• Clear evidence of learning.

The call for the 2008 award has been sent to departments.

Two new colloquia highlight CTE’s fall schedule

This fall, KU faculty members have formed two groups to discuss key teaching issues. Each colloquium will meet at CTE in 135 Budig over the noon hour. Lunch is provided; contact CTE at cte@ku.edu to RSVP.

The Interdisciplinary Teaching in International Studies Colloquium is discussing:
Reflections on Interdisciplinary Teaching—Oct. 1
How to Fly Solo—Oct. 22
Tag Team and Beyond—Nov. 12
The Future of IIT at KU—Dec. 3

The Teaching Large Classes Colloquium is focusing on the following topics:
Writing in Large Classes—Oct. 2
Managing a Mega-Class—Oct. 16
Engaging Students: Technology and More—Nov. 13

In October and November, CTE will also offer sessions as described below.

October 17, 3 - 4 PM
Teaching & Technology: KEEP Toolkit. Demonstration and discussion of an easy-access electronic portfolio tool available to KU faculty and students. Co-sponsored by CTE and IDS.

October 18, 3 - 4 PM
Teaching Tea: Inductive Teaching. How to make learning grow organically in class discussions.

October 23, 12 - 1 PM
Lunch & Conversation: Copyright Issues. Brownbag. A conversation about the new policies regarding fair use.

October 30, 12 - 1 PM

November 1, 3 - 4 PM
Teaching Tea: Implementing New Promotion and Tenure Guidelines. Discussion of recommendations made last year by a University task force.

All sessions are open to faculty, instructional staff, and GTAs. For more information, contact CTE at 864.4100 or cte@ku.edu, or see www.cte.ku.edu.
Three models for GTA preparation at KU: Biology, English, and Spanish and Portuguese

Several KU departments, particularly those with a large number of GTAs, provide a comprehensive program that prepares graduate students to teach. Three programs—biology, English, and Spanish and Portuguese—are described briefly here.

**Biology**
The Undergraduate Biology Program centers on a one-hour course taught by Chris Hauffler, program director. “TAs represent the front line in the undergraduate teaching mission of the biological sciences,” stated Hauffler. “TAs are the ones who provide undergraduates with their first experience in active learning. TAs see small groups of students and lead them to understand and appreciate the science of biology through experiments, direct observations, thoughtful reflection and integration of ideas; TAs can model learning through doing. Biology undergraduates first see professors along with hundreds of their peers, and view them as impersonal talking heads with little direct connection to their lives, their education and their futures. It is essential, therefore, that we help TAs make the all-important link between concepts and factoids presented in large lectures and the organisms and processes that constitute biology.”

“I tell the TAs that this is THEIR course,” continued Hauffler, “and it is offered as part of helping them be effective instructors and enjoy the opportunity to teach about biology.”

The goals of the course are:
- To provide GTAs with a forum for discussion of issues and concerns regarding teaching.
- To introduce all GTAs to resources, opportunities and perspectives in teaching.

**Biology Best Practice:** Recognizes that GTAs are an all-important link between concepts and factoids presented in large lectures and the organisms and processes that constitute biology.

- To share experiences, challenges, expectations and needs about teaching and students.
- To institute a culture of sharing and communication about teaching rather than maintaining teaching as only an individualized enterprise.

To accomplish these goals, all first time biology GTAs gather weekly and address topics about teaching at KU from various perspectives. They visit relevant offices and hear about resources. They also consider topics drawn from readings.

Each class member is assigned to a small group that organizes a presentation of one of the papers that the class reads during the semester. These groups develop a class discussion about the topic of the reading and to show creativity and initiative in exploring ways to engage and involve the rest of the class (guidelines for group-led discussions are provided). During the semester, they also hear from experienced professors and experienced GTAs about their views on teaching and their recommendations for teaching well.

**English**
In the Department of English, GTA preparation begins with an extensive orientation the week before classes start, continues with a three-hour course that combines the study of composition theory and a practicum in the first semester, a one-hour practicum in the second semester, and continued support for the rest of a GTA’s career in the form of a faculty teaching advisor, a series of professional development workshops, sessions on grading standards, and a Blackboard site with discussion blogs and sample syllabi and assignments for 100- and 200-level courses.

According to Sonya Lancaster, associate director of Freshman-Sophomore English, highlights of the department’s new GTA orientation are extensive work on developing course policies for the syllabus, the introduction of
the standard syllabus that GTAs will use the first semester and discussion of the ways they can customize it, discussions with experienced GTAs of scenarios of classroom situations, and the grading of three papers with discussion of grading standards and commenting styles.

**English Best Practice:**
GTAs keep journals or teaching logs and complete projects that show their ability to put the theory they are learning into practice.

During their first semester of teaching, GTAs take ENGL 801: Study and Teaching of Writing. This team-taught course is a combination of a graded course that introduces GTAs to recent scholarship on the teaching of writing and a practicum. In most course offerings, GTAs keep journals or teaching logs and complete projects that show their ability to put the theory they are learning into practice. Class periods are split between discussions of the readings and discussion of the practical matters of teaching a section of ENGL 101.

During their second semester of teaching, GTAs take ENGL 802: Practicum in the Teaching of College English. This one-hour course supports GTAs as they teach ENGL 102 for the first time. For the course, GTAs choose a text and types of assignments for the units they will teach, collaborate with classmates to write assignments, observe each other’s teaching, analyze their commenting style, and write a self-assessment of their teaching.

**Spanish and Portuguese**
Like some other departments, Spanish and Portuguese offers an orientation for new GTAs before classes begin. Participants learn about the Basic Spanish Language program from student, instructor and institutional perspectives. Other highlights include a microteaching session for each new GTA and a technology workshop.

During GTAs’ first semester of teaching, they take a three-hour course, Teaching College Spanish. Amy Rossomondo, who co-directs the Basic Spanish Language program with Rosalea Postma-Carttar, teaches the course. In the course syllabus, Rossomondo explains, “We require incoming Spanish instructors to take SPAN 801 so that they will not only understand how we teach here at KU, but also why we teach this way.”

Key course goals include:
- To overview communicative task-based language instruction, which consists of exploring proven teaching methods and practices as well as the theory and research that inform these practices.
- To enable students to understand, explain and successfully contribute to the mission of the Spanish Basic Language program at KU.

In addition, the department offers SPAN 802: Colloquium on Teaching, a one-credit course for continuing GTAs that addresses specific issues of the course that the GTA is teaching in that particular semester. Spanish and Portuguese also has an ongoing program of teaching observations by the co-directors of the Spanish Language Instruction program and individual course coordinators.

**Spanish & Portuguese Best Practice:**
GTAs learn how to provide communicative task-based language instruction, as well as why such instruction is effective.

**Conclusion**
These three programs illustrate some of the options that are possible for department-level preparation of GTAs. The programs also serve as a foundation for graduate students who are preparing for the professoriate. Students who would like to explore their own teaching in depth as part of their professional preparation may wish to consider additional opportunities, such as the spring 2008 course LA&S 792: Being an Effective College Instructor (see page 2) or other programs offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence. See www.cte.ku.edu for more information.
Engaging graduate students in classroom teaching

Lynn Villafuerte, Office for Diversity in Science Training

In fall 2006, the Center for Remote Sensing of Ice Sheets (CReSIS), the Center for Environmentally Beneficial Catalysis (CEBC) and the Center for Teaching Excellence collaborated on a graduate course on teaching at the college level. Students in chemistry, engineering and education completed the course, as well as two post-doctoral fellows. In addition, a student at the University of Iowa, one of the CEBC core partner universities, participated in the class through video conferencing.

**Purposes and participants**
The course catered to a diverse group of graduate students who aimed for a career in teaching, and it provided background on how to prepare for teaching. Thus, students identified goals of teaching and designed teaching styles and topics based on these goals. Strategies aside from a traditional lecture-based approach were explored in addition to performance assessment and evaluation methods. The course also established a structure to prepare future faculty by allowing students to experience the process of teaching in a practicum.

This course was relevant not only to students who participated but also to faculty members who facilitated the class. It provided an opportunity to explore a general strategy for enhancing graduate education. Feedback on this course has had a significant impact on other courses that prepare graduate students to teach.

Finally, the course allowed students to approach teaching as inquiry and provided a framework that promotes improvement of the practice of teaching and student learning.

**Course design**
The course prepared students for teaching through readings and discussion, through guided practice of unit design and delivery, and through public reflection of the process in an electronic portfolio. Each student prepared and taught a unit within a course under a faculty mentor who was the peer audience for preparation and reflection about the course. The process of preparation, teaching practice and reflection was documented in the portfolio. Classes were structured to combine lecture with substantial input from students. Prior to each class session, students used Blackboard’s discussion board to post insights on assigned readings, as well as provide feedback on other postings. This facilitated a more engaging discussion in class. In addition, on several topics, a hands-on approach or class activity was utilized to demonstrate a variety of teaching tools.

The semester was composed of a preparatory segment, active teaching and assessment. Nine weeks were allocated to readings and discussions in the preparatory segment, which included backward design, interactive and active learning, strategies for organizing scientific curricula, concept test and response systems, models for group discovery, peer led team learning, inquiry labs and tutorials, context and remembering, and grading issues (rubrics, cognitive apprenticeship, goals of grading).

This was followed by a teaching practicum. Each student chose a faculty mentor and taught a portion of his or her mentor’s course, typically a one-week unit. A team of four faculty members and a graduate student served as evaluators for this activity. Feedback on the student’s active teaching was incorporated into the assessment.

**Final project**
The final requirement of the course was an electronic teaching portfolio that documented each student’s process of preparation and teaching. Using the KEEP Toolkit, students prepared their own teaching portfolios. A diverse set of themes and topics was generated by class members.

The semester evaluations were very positive. Students expressed appreciation for having learned a lot and found the electronic portfolio very useful. Moreover, the portfolios demonstrated that students had achieved key course goals, particularly regarding approaching teaching as inquiry.
O’Lear and Weaver named first CTE Faculty Fellows

This fall, CTE initiated its Faculty Fellows program, in which selected faculty members assume a leadership role within the Center. CTE is pleased to announce that Shannon O’Lear, associate professor of geography and environmental studies, and Catherine Weaver, assistant professor of political science, have been named Fellows for 2007–09.

O’Lear has taught at KU since 2004 and served as the geography Ambassador to CTE before her appointment as a Faculty Fellow. Before coming to KU, she taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she participated in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Teaching Academy and Teaching Mentor Program.

Weaver has taught at KU since 2002 and has been active in various CTE programs, including the Faculty Seminar. She has received several teaching awards and is co-leading the Interdisciplinary Teaching in International Studies Colloquium at CTE this fall (see page 3).

Fellows will serve a two year-term. Their responsibilities are based on their backgrounds, interests and experiences, as well as CTE’s specific needs. The program has three goals:

- To support Fellows in their own professional growth,
- To broaden CTE’s impact within the KU community, and
- To make available to all KU faculty members the knowledge and expertise that the Fellows possess.

Fall 2007 participants, spring 2008 programs announced

Recently, faculty members received calls for applications for CTE spring 2008 programs.

Faculty Seminar participants will focus on interdisciplinary teaching. Those in the New Designs in Learning program (formerly Faculty Fellows) will identify a learning goal and develop ways of enhancing their teaching so students can reach that goal.

Teaching Grants support innovative ways to enhance learning. More information and copies of applications are available at CTE’s website, www.cte.ku.edu.

Last spring, CTE’s advisory board made the following awards for fall 2007 programs.

Best Practices Institute: Raquel Alexander, accounting and information systems; So-Min Cheong, geography; Terry Clark, EECS; Sergey Dolgopoloski, religious studies; Ray Finch, Russian, East European and Eurasian studies; Stephanie Fitzgerald, English/indigenous nations studies; Debra Hedden, music and dance; Bonnie Johnson, urban planning; Dongbin Kim, educational policy and leadership studies; Ok Jean Kim, pharmacology and toxicology; Tiffany Johnson, speech-language-hearing; Kelly LeRoux, public administration; Belinda McSwain Sturm, CEAE; Michael Moody, public administration; Steven Schrock, CEAE; Woochan Shim, social welfare; and Ketty Wong-Cruz, music and dance. BPI 2007 facilitators were Caroline Bennett, CEAE; Cindy Colwell Dunn, music and dance; and Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology.

Faculty Seminar: Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, HWC; Caroline Bennett, CEAE; Sonya Lancaster, English; Yajaira Padilla, Spanish and Portuguese; Kim Warren, history.

New Designs in Learning: Yong Bai, CEAE.

Teaching Grants: Alison Gabriele and Harold Torrence, linguistics; Jun Huan, EECS; and Brent Metz, anthropology.
Five strategies to enhance the experience of future faculty members

In *Paths to the Professoriate: Strategies for Enriching the Preparation of Future Faculty*, editors Donald H. Wulff and Ann E. Austin present five conclusions and related implications for strategic action for supporting doctoral students who are preparing to teach at the college level.

1. **Students need help getting started in graduate school in ways that promote success.**
   Entrance and orientation—Implications for strategic action:
   - Plan a thorough orientation.
   - Use initial goal-setting meetings.

2. **Key to the success of doctoral students is the extent to which they connect with the people and cultures of their departments.**
   Opportunities for connection—Implications for strategic action:
   - Cultivate a sense of intellectual belonging.
   - Encourage informal interactions.

3. **Doctoral students need preparation for a broader conception of the faculty role.**
   Preparation for the faculty role—Implications for strategic action:
   - Provide systematic preparation for teaching.
   - Provide thorough preparation for research.
   - Prepare aspiring faculty for service and other aspects of academic life.

4. **Doctoral students need ample career-planning information and opportunities.**
   Career preparation—Implications for strategic action:
   - Prepare prospective faculty for a changing context.
   - Help students prepare for an array of academic options.
   - Create awareness and knowledge of nonacademic options.
   - Arrange discussions about choices in faculty work.
   - Provide completion rates and placement information.
   - Offer job-search guidance.

5. **Carefully constructed advising and mentoring relationships are important to the success of graduate students.**
   Advising and feedback—Implications for strategic action:
   - Establish standards for advising and clarify advisor responsibilities.
   - Encourage graduate students to interact with a number of faculty members.