Educating Future Faculty to Engage with a New Demographic
Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, University of California, Merced
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Project Overview

Graduate students are potential future faculty who face challenges significantly different from those of their predecessors, including working with students who represent increasingly diverse ethnicities and academic backgrounds (Austin, 2002). Further, academic culture is being transformed by national and regional accreditation standards that require faculty to collect and analyze evidence of student learning outcomes to confirm and improve programs (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2008). To succeed in future professions or academe, graduate students will need opportunities to engage with the scholarship of teaching, which current research shows is best gained through collaborative forums, for example, seminars, workshops, and learning communities that bridge the divide between coursework and independent research. (Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts 2005; Trautmann & Krasny, 2006).

We are proposing to engage UC Merced graduate students in developing a graduate-level pedagogy course entitled "Teaching Matters," the curriculum of which will focus on the development of researched articles linked to interactive modules primarily focused on the learning needs of the new university demographic – first-generation students. In Year 1 grant funds will support faculty and graduate student teaching fellows who plan the curriculum for this non-credit course and who make this curriculum available nationally, via the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence (the Center) website and the California Digital Library eScholarship project. This curriculum includes developing a guidebook to describe the purpose and use of exportable modules. These modules, authored by graduate students, will be brief single-subject teaching approaches to address the needs of first-generation college students.

The "Teaching Matters" course will be developed via learning communities. Although effective teaching practices transcend disciplinary boundaries, we envision two working groups (comprised of 1 faculty member and 4 graduate student fellows in each learning community) that will explore disciplinary conventions for teaching in the sciences and humanities, but through the lens of pedagogies that meet the learning needs of first-generation students. During Year 2, the course will be piloted with a second cohort of graduate students, who similarly have completed their qualifying exams and who, as they take the course, will develop researched articles and associated modules. Like Year 1, this learning community will be similarly dedicated to developing foundational aspects of implementing this project, including drafting course curriculum, peer reviewing and publishing projects, and promoting the guidebook via a local conference. As the course is offered each ensuing year, new participants will to contribute additional research and modules, with the benefit of gaining experience with teaching and publishing in a collaborative environment. National studies have identified the stage following qualifying exams as a critical moment for persistence in a graduate student's career, so the ongoing "Teaching Matters" workshops will provide an important forum for maintaining mentoring relationships and community. This process of designing course and the resulting non-credit workshop series beyond the grant will offer graduate students a learning community during the transition from coursework to independent research, a stage often characterized by isolation (Lovitts, 2005).

Graduate students who participate in "Teaching Matters" will be afforded opportunities to network with colleagues, develop innovative curriculum, and prepare to effectively meet the needs of all undergraduates they teach. Among the outcomes of this advanced graduate-level pedagogy course will be instructional materials and researched articles that are peer-reviewed and edited by "Teaching Matters" participants and its associated editorial board. Curriculum, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies and conference proceedings resulting from this project will be published as an eScholarship series in the California Digital Library collection http://repositories.cdlib.org/escholarship/, which will allow this project to produce a "guidebook" to the graduate course curriculum in the form of traditional text, as well as interactive modules that will linked to the eScholarship materials and available on the Center website. Following Year 2, additional curriculum will be developed and reviewed on an on-going basis as a result of each subsequent pedagogy course. In Year 2, graduate students will also have opportunity to plan and host a conference, for promoting this curriculum and networking with local teachers.

Our project serves to expand non-credit course offerings in graduate student teaching support as well as to provide student learning outcome evidence on which to base the improvement of academic programs. Involving graduate students in producing curriculum relating to pedagogy is a novel approach to investigating teaching and learning, given that the limited examples of this type of project have been written by senior faculty as a summative approach to imparting extensive classroom experience. A notable example is the University of Wisconsin's faculty-authored teaching guidebooks www.cirtl.net/guidebooks.html, funded by the National Science Foundation; however, our proposal is distinctive in that it creates an exportable graduate student pedagogy course with interactive modules. Similar efforts to provide interactive teaching tools, such as Michigan State's FIPSE-funded "Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts" video vignettes www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/conflict.htm, are limited by needing an additional infrastructure of in-person training to be able to use the instructional materials. Our proposal is distinguished by its ability to provide a stand-alone model for teacher training, linked to interactive modules on which to build discussion and implement change.