

## Preparing Advocates for Faculty Development

### Expanding the Meaning of “Growing Our Own”

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*Discussions about preparing newcomers for faculty development focus almost exclusively on the staffing needs of teaching centers. Unfortunately, this emphasis significantly narrows what it means to prepare people for the field. Instead, we suggest that successful preparation has two elements: preparation of talented individuals for formal positions in the field and preparation of knowledgeable advocates or allies. As evidence, we present results from a survey of our center’s graduate teaching consultants, documenting how their work shaped their future connections to faculty development. Our results challenge centers to consider how their programming can “grow” both professionals in and advocates for faculty development.*

Since the early 1990s, POD members have discussed how best to attract and prepare newcomers for work in faculty development (Chism 1998, 2007; Chism, Palmer, & Stanley, 2006; Gillespie, 2001; Sell & Chism, 1991; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006). This conversation has focused almost exclusively on the staffing needs of administrative units devoted to faculty development. Unfortunately, this emphasis significantly narrows what it means to attract people to and prepare them for work in the field.

Instead, we suggest that successful preparation has two elements: 1) direct preparation of talented individuals for formal positions in faculty development *and* 2) preparation of knowledgeable advocates or allies who are prepared to weave connections with faculty development into their own faculty roles. To explore this issue more fully, we present here the results of a survey of the individuals who have served in our center's Graduate Teaching Consultant (GTC) program. One purpose of the survey was to discern how their work as GTCs shaped their future connections to the field of faculty development. We believe the results challenge all teaching centers to examine how their programming, especially their programming for graduate students, can be used to "grow" both professionals in and advocates for faculty development.

## Context

Faculty development has grown and institutionalized substantially since the early 1960s (Sorcinelli et al., 2006). With that growth have come discussions about how best to attract talented and diverse individuals to the field. Understandably, much of that attention has focused on issues particular to staffing administrative units devoted to faculty development. For example, some authors describe the characteristics or qualifications of ideal faculty developers (Chism, 1998, 2007; Gillespie, 2001; Porter, Lewis, Kristensen, Stanley, & Weiss, 1993). Others provide advice for those seeking to hire new faculty developers (Cook, Kalish, & Pingree, 2004; Sell & Chism, 1991). Because of the diverse paths to faculty development, identifying pools of recruits is a challenge in itself, necessitating institutionalized teaching centers to play a major role in "growing our own" (Sell & Chism, p. 27).

Cook and Sorcinelli (2002, p. B21) describe how this path to the profession unfolds: "Many instructional developers enter the profession by serving apprenticeships with a teaching center. There they get practical experience, learn about best practices, and access the rich body of literature on student learning." Yet this focus on the staffing needs of centers overlooks several other realities. First, a significant amount of faculty development is conducted by individuals who do not define themselves as professionals in the field (Sorcinelli et al., 2006). For example, faculty

at many liberal arts or comprehensive institutions may rotate on and off professional development committees. In addition, administrators in other types of units may find themselves exploring or responding to issues of faculty development. Second, the work of those in faculty development units rests on the ability to build connections with allies in many roles and settings in higher education. As we focus on ways to attract people to the field, we must consider our ability to influence those located throughout a college or university, such as administrators, faculty, and lecturers.

Despite these realities, little work has documented how established centers use their resources to help “seed” an appreciation for faculty development among future faculty or administrators. For example, despite the attention Cook and Sorcinelli (2002) and Sell and Chism (1991) pay to teaching center apprenticeships, they do so only in the context of growing future professional staff. Any additional benefits of these apprenticeships are to the graduate students’ own future careers—equipping them to be more effective teachers—rather than to the field of faculty development.

Yet there is fragmentary evidence that teaching center programs can prepare both professionals in and advocates for the field of faculty development. For example, in assessing the impact of the POD Diversity Internship Grant, Ouellett and Stanley (2004) document how center apprenticeships can attract talented individuals to the field. In describing the paths of the POD interns they interviewed, they note the following:

The eight past interns were split equally between those specifically interested in a career in faculty and instructional development and those who viewed their internship experiences as contributing to different career goals in higher education (e.g., tenure-track faculty lines). At the time of this study, one past intern now served as chair of her college’s faculty development committee, one intern was hired by her center as a permanent instructional development consultant, and one intern has a full-time position in student affairs with significant responsibilities related to faculty and instructor development. (p. 215)

Although they do not use these results to highlight the dual meaning of “preparation” that we posit, the Ouellett and Stanley data are clear evidence of the value of doing so.

In the pages that follow, we first provide a brief overview of the Graduate Teaching Consultant program at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), University of Michigan. We then describe our evaluation methodology and present our findings. We end with some final thoughts about the implications of this work for faculty development.

## **Program Overview**

CRLT's Graduate Teaching Consultant (GTC) program was created in 1997 in order to enhance the center's ability to meet the individualized consulting needs of teaching assistants at the University of Michigan. Each year, between six and twelve advanced graduate students participate in the program. Overall, forty-eight students have served as GTCs. GTCs typically work with the center for one to three years, though some have served longer. Many interact with the center beyond the confines of the GTC program itself, working with us on TA orientations and workshops or attending our Preparing Future Faculty programs.

In recruiting GTCs, deliberate efforts have been made to construct demographically diverse groups. The GTC population is about evenly divided among the humanities (31 percent), social sciences (40 percent), and science, mathematics, and engineering disciplines (29 percent), and most GTCs are female (65 percent). In spite of outreach to organizations serving graduate students of color, most GTCs are white (77 percent), which is probably due to the underrepresentation of minorities in many graduate programs on campus.

The GTC program has two main components: 1) a teaching circle that meets weekly or biweekly and 2) the individual consultations conducted by each GTC. The teaching circle, led by an experienced center consultant, serves as the primary training seminar for the group. Meetings are facilitated both by center staff and by GTCs, who often take the lead by presenting consulting case studies or topical training sessions. Content reflects both center needs and participant interest, with sessions focusing on effective consulting techniques, multicultural learning and teaching, and general teaching strategies. As the GTC program evolved, we added content to introduce graduate students to the

field of faculty development, complementing their exposure to the methods and literature of the field. Varying from year to year, the program generally includes readings and class discussions about teaching centers, center staff postings, the POD Network, as well as interaction with guest speakers from the field. Most recently, two GTCs attended the POD Conference and shared resources gathered and experiences gained with the rest of the group.

## **Method**

To assess the long-term impact of the GTC program, we posed two focal questions to guide our evaluation. Specifically, we asked whether the GTC program situates the work of GTCs in the larger field of faculty development in a way that, first, seeds future connections to teaching and learning centers and, second, encourages interactions with colleagues around instructional and professional development issues. We asked all GTCs who had been through the program, from its inception (1997–98 academic year) through the 2006–07 academic year, to respond to an online survey distributed through SurveyMonkey. Of these forty-eight GTCs, forty-two responded to the survey, resulting in an 88 percent response rate.

The survey instrument asked GTCs about their current positions, their interface with a teaching and learning center (if any) on their campus, their networking with colleagues around pedagogical and professional development issues, and the influences they perceived the program had on their careers. The survey, a copy of which appears in Appendix A, collected both quantitative and qualitative information. For this study, the quantitative findings were primary. We report these in descriptive statistics, complemented by illustrative quotes.

We asked the former GTCs to report on their current careers and institutional contexts. Given that recent cohorts were included in the survey, it is not surprising that a third (fourteen, or 33 percent) of respondents are still in graduate school at the University of Michigan (see Table 20.1). A minority (five, or 12 percent) are now employed in nonacademic positions for government, industry, or nonprofits, or they are looking for work.

**Table 20.1. Current Employment of Former GTCs**

<i>Current Position</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Tenure-Track Faculty	17 (41%)
Graduate Student	14 (33%)
Nonacademic Position	5 (12%)
Faculty/TA Development	3 (7%)
Lecturer	2 (5%)
Higher Education Administration (not faculty/ TA development-related)	1 (2%)

However, a majority (twenty-three, or 55 percent) of respondents have their doctorates and now work in higher education. A few former GTCs (three) have entered into faculty development careers, confirming the observations of Cook and Sorcinelli (2002) and Sell and Chism (1991) that some instructional developers enter the field through apprenticeships at teaching centers. However, most are now working in tenure-track faculty positions (seventeen), as lecturers (two), or in nonfaculty development higher education administration positions (one). Given the teaching focus of the GTC program, it is interesting that nearly half of the respondents (eleven) in higher education positions were located in research university contexts. Others worked in master's universities (six), liberal arts colleges (four), or specialized institutions (two).

## **Findings and Discussion**

In this section, we explore two key ways that the faculty and graduate students in our study describe the impact of the GTC program. First, we focus on the twenty-three respondents who now work in higher education, and we document the new connections that they have made with teaching and learning centers on their campuses. Second, we look at both graduate students and faculty and administrators, and we examine their instructional and organizational development initiatives. We also note our hypotheses about why the GTC program may have helped foster these activities.

**Table 20.2. Number and Percent of Respondents Reporting Interactions with Teaching Centers and Colleagues, by Current Position**

<i>Type of Interaction</i>	<i>Faculty and Administrators</i>	<i>Graduate Students</i>
Worked in/with teaching center	10 (71%) <sup>a</sup>	NA <sup>b</sup>
Mentored	21 (91%)	13 (93%)
Provided resources	15 (65%)	11 (79%)
N	23	14

<sup>a</sup>Percent indicates the proportion of those who have worked with the teaching center (ten), out of those who have a teaching center on campus (fourteen).

<sup>b</sup>Not asked of graduate students because as a GTC, they have worked with CRLT.

### Connections with Teaching Centers

Of the twenty-three respondents in higher education faculty and administrative positions, most (fourteen) report that their campuses host a teaching center. Of those with a teaching center, a majority (ten) have, at some time, worked in or with these units (see Table 20.2). (Current graduate students were not asked this question, because by definition, they have worked with CRLT on their home campus.) As mentioned earlier, three former GTCs have careers in faculty development. However, most past GTC participants work not within but in partnership with their teaching centers. Many report attending programs or facilitating workshops. For example, one current faculty member at a large research university notes that she has “attended programs and participated in a summer fellowship that included facilitating two workshops.”

Even more significantly, respondents say that their GTC experience has encouraged them to value and make connections with teaching centers on their current campuses. An award-winning professor at a research university notes:

The experience I gained as a GTC, both training and an awareness of how important and valuable it is to talk about teaching with peers, made me seek out the [teaching center] here at [my research university] right away.

Even those without teaching centers report a similar impact. A faculty member at a Hispanic-serving institution describes a drive to create a teaching and learning unit on his campus, using the connections made in the GTC program, this way: “The staff at CRLT continues to be a valuable resource for me. My recent correspondence with them has helped me formulate ideas to start a similar center on our campus.”

What aspects of the GTC program foster these connections? We believe there are two. First, the program teaches processes for continual instructional improvement, which enables GTCs to see critical student feedback as constructive, rather than as attributable to poor students or to immutable personal failures. For example, a professor in the humanities notes, “Based on the evaluations I participated in, I tend to think of things I am doing WELL and ways that I would like to IMPROVE, rather than in more negative terms (e.g., framing as failures).” Another respondent—a student affairs administrator who continues to teach—also describes how the program has helped him significantly reframe student feedback:

CRLT opened my eyes. It changed my life. I was one of those graduate students on the way to blaming students for the shortcomings of his own courses. . . . I began to see that there were alternatives to “blaming the students,” specifically ways . . . to promote “significant learning experiences.”

Because instructional improvement is framed positively, GTCs may be likely to seek out resources that can help interpret and gather student feedback. Second, by providing an explicit introduction to the field of faculty development, the program provides GTCs with the information needed to locate instructional resources available on other campuses.

### Connections with Colleagues

The GTC program also appears to facilitate the development of social networks around teaching. Among former GTCs, a significant majority of both the graduate students and faculty and higher education administrators report mentoring peers (thirteen and twenty-one, respectively) and sharing resources around instructional issues (fifteen and eleven) in the past year (see Table 20.2). These



pedagogical interactions took two forms. First, particularly among graduate students, respondents describe how they developed one-to-one relationships to support others' instructional and professional development. In addition, graduate students report "increased communication with other instructors" and regular "mentoring around professional development issues."

Second, while those in faculty roles have also connected individually with their colleagues around teaching, some also have undertaken broader educational development initiatives. For example, one engineering faculty member describes creating pedagogical discussion groups on her campus: "Even though my university does not have a teaching and learning center, the experiences I had with the GTC teaching circle led me to find others with similar priorities and create our own informal teaching circle." Another professor in the humanities recounts how he serves as a bridge between his unit and the broader pedagogical community: "I . . . take faculty to the annual Lilly Conference at Miami. I also attend national workshops, and I present on those workshops when I return."

In explaining why they develop these connections, some GTCs explicitly cite the consultation approaches they learned in their GTC group, which stress collaborative problem solving. For example, one liberal arts faculty member reports:

I spend more time talking with other faculty about their teaching methods and listening to and learning from their approaches. . . . I think my CRLT experience has especially helped me to get other faculty to open up and share their teaching techniques without feeling competitive or judged, so I get more/better information.

A lecturer states that through her GTC group experience she "became a much better collaborator and developed skills to talk about teaching with people that make the conversations more egalitarian and productive."

## Conclusion

Much research documents that postsecondary teaching can be "a private affair" (Seldin, 1990, p. 5) in which faculty tend not to discuss their teaching with colleagues (Shulman, 2004; Wright, 2005). In contrast, many former GTCs indicate that they are connected

to—and building—teaching exchanges and resources on their campuses and that their involvement with the GTC program has helped them see teaching as “community property” (Shulman, 2004).

The implications for faculty development are threefold. First, our research calls for a greater attentiveness to the ways that allies and advocates create connections to the field of faculty development. Others have examined paths into professional faculty development positions (for example, *Pathways to the Profession of Educational Development*, n.d.; Sorcinelli et al., 2006). We suggest a similar focus on those drawn into the “orbit” of faculty development work. Such a focus would document the path of faculty and administrators who do instructional and organizational development but do not have appointments in teaching centers.

Second, the evaluation model presented here may be useful to investigate the long-term impact of other GTC programs. Although they are not common, other examples of such models include the University of Virginia’s Teaching Fellows program and the University of North Carolina Graduate Teaching Consultants program, as well as teaching consultant programs at Brown University and Northwestern University.

Finally, the positive impact of the University of Michigan GTC program suggests that it may be helpful to expand opportunities for such training beyond the limited number of universities offering GTC programs. There may be a role for the POD Network to create cross-institutional opportunities for graduate student or postdoctoral apprenticeships in teaching centers. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore how faculty development issues can be woven into the extensive network of Preparing Future Faculty programs and even TA preparation programs. How can we better prepare prospective faculty and higher education administrators to see the rich possibilities of engagement with faculty development programs and resources? Features of our GTC program, such as discussions of POD and teaching centers, student feedback models, and the introduction of faculty development as a career path may be useful enhancements applicable to many programs for tomorrow’s professoriate.

One can never have too many allies, and better examining how we attract advocates to faculty development would serve us all.

# Appendix A

## GTC Survey

### Consent

The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) is exploring the impact of the Graduate Teaching Consultant (GTC) Program. Your participation in this short survey is confidential and voluntary. You may choose not to respond to the survey. You should understand that your participation will have no impact on current or future employment with CRLT.

Responding to the survey should take you fewer than ten minutes.

Moving on to complete the survey indicates your consent to participate in this research.

If you have questions about the study or this survey, please contact one of the co-investigators:

1. Mary Wright, CRLT, 1071 Palmer Commons, Ann Arbor, MI. 48109, Email: mcwright@umich.edu
2. Deborah Meizlish, CRLT, 1071 Palmer Commons, Ann Arbor, MI. 48109, E-mail: debmeiz@umich.edu, Phone: 734-763-2396.

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933, e-mail: irbhsbs@umich.edu.

1. Do you wish to go on to complete the survey?

- I consent to move on to this survey. I understand that I may skip any question I do not wish to answer.
- I do not consent.

*Your Background*

2. Please describe your current career: (Choose the *one* that best applies, but feel free to write additional clarification in the Other box.)
- Graduate student
  - Lecturer
  - Tenured or tenure-track faculty
  - Faculty or graduate student development professional (working in a teaching center)
  - Higher education administrator (other than faculty/graduate student development)
  - I am not working in higher education (please describe your position in the Other box below)
  - Other: (please describe)

*Teaching Center*

3. [*If respondent is not a graduate student and is working in higher education*] Does your campus have a teaching center? (Here, a teaching center is defined as a designated individual or an organizational unit that works with instructors and administrators on teaching and learning-related issues.)
- Yes
  - No
4. [*If yes*] In any capacity, have you worked with this teaching center on your campus?
- Yes
  - No
5. In what capacity have you worked with the teaching center on your campus? Please describe (e.g., facilitated workshops, attended programs, directed the center, served as a faculty liaison).

*Higher Education Context*

6. [*If respondent is working in higher education*] In what type of institution do you work?
- Research university

- Comprehensive/master's university
- Liberal arts college
- Community/two-year college
- Other (please specify)

*Teaching*

7. Please choose the response that best applies to your teaching at the postsecondary level.
  - I currently teach at the postsecondary level.
  - In the past year, I taught at the postsecondary level.
  - It's been 1–2 years since I taught at the postsecondary level.
  - It's been over 2 years since I taught at the postsecondary level.
8. [*If respondent has taught in the past 2 years*] Has your experience in the GTC program influenced your teaching practice?
  - Yes
  - No
9. Please give examples of the way your experience in the GTC program has influenced your teaching practice.

*Mentoring*

10. In the past year, have you formally or informally mentored, advised, or consulted with other graduate students or faculty around instructional or professional development issues?
  - Yes
  - No
11. [*If yes*] Please give some examples of how you have mentored other graduate students or faculty around instructional or professional development issues. (e.g., the type of assistance you were able to provide)

*Resources*

12. In the past year, have you provided resources on teaching, learning, or higher education to other graduate students or faculty?
  - Yes
  - No

13. [If yes] Please give examples of the types of resources you have provided on topics pertaining to teaching, learning, and higher education. Also, please note if there were any resources that you originally learned about from the GTC program.

*Career Path*

14. Did your involvement in the GTC program influence your career path (i.e., your intended or current choice of career type or setting)?  
 Yes  
 No
15. [If yes] In what ways did your involvement with the GTC program influence the direction of your career?
16. Please describe any other influence of the GTC Program on you personally that you feel is significant.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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