



## What are We Doing to Prepare Future Faculty to Teach?

Dr. Robert Terry, Jr.

Land grant institutions, like Oklahoma State, have a well-earned reputation for developing excellent researchers. In fact, a primary focus of doctoral degree programs at such universities is providing students with the knowledge and experiences needed to conduct high quality research.



I took a quick perusal of PhD requirements for programs on our campus. Anywhere from nearly one-third to more than half of the curriculum for such programs is associated with research.

Doctoral candidates are expected to complete courses in research methods, statistics, program evaluation, and grant seeking, all with the goal to help them become effective researchers. There is no question this investment in research training has benefited the students, universities, and society as a whole. But, what about academic preparation in other areas a PhD may be assigned?

Many students pursuing a doctoral degree do so with the goal to become a faculty member at a university. With few exceptions, university faculty have at least *some* expectation to teach. It stands to reason, doctoral degree programs would include required coursework on the subject of teaching and learning, right? Wrong. My review of PhD degree curriculum at OSU revealed the only programs requiring students to take any courses preparing them to teach are those in “education” disciplines.

Now, more than ever, universities should be concerned about the quality of teaching in their academic programs. In addition to the long-standing logical and ethical reasons for providing an excellent education to students, we must consider the business of higher education. Today, most public, higher education institutions, including OSU, generate a majority of their funding from

tuition and fees (“For First Time,” 2018). What happens if a university gains the reputation for poor teaching? In an environment where there is a premium on customer service, the customers – students – will undoubtedly go somewhere else for their education. Consider the implications of decreasing enrollment under this funding model upon research and outreach as well as general maintenance and operating functions.

So, what can be done to prepare future faculty to be effective teachers? Although workshops on teaching offered by some colleges and ITLE are certainly of value, we have to acknowledge one or two days each year devoted to the complexities of teaching is not enough to develop any level of mastery. At the very least, doctoral students who aspire to university faculty positions should be required to complete coursework in college teaching methods. Research literature on effective teaching at the college level is abundant (Nilson, 2010), and future teachers should be exposed to theories and practices used by the best college teachers. Fortunately, several classes of this nature are currently offered on our campus, including: AGED 5813 - *College Teaching in Agriculture and Natural Resources*; EPSY 5983 - *Instructional Effectiveness in Higher Education*; HESA 6713 - *Effective Teaching in Colleges and Universities*; and, HIST 5021 - *Teaching History at the College Level*. After completing such a course, future faculty should have a practicum experience as a teacher under the supervision of a mentor with expertise in pedagogy and/or andragogy. These novice instructors should never be put in the position to “sink or swim” while leading a class or lab section. Obviously, such an arrangement is a disservice to TAs and their students. Another way to address this issue is to promote the College Teaching Graduate Certificate offered at OSU and OSU-Tulsa. This program requires only 12 credit hours and includes courses in pedagogy and supervised practicums (College Teaching Certificate, 2018).

We don't assume future faculty can be effective researchers without coursework and supervised experiences in research. Why would we assume the same kind of preparation is unnecessary for them to become effective teachers? It's time we get serious about preparing future faculty to be effective teachers if we expect excellent performance in higher education classrooms.

## References

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**To discuss this topic further with the author, contact Dr. Rob Terry at [rob.terry@okstate.edu](mailto:rob.terry@okstate.edu).**

