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Research on Faculty as Teaching Mentors: Lessons Learned from a Study of Participants in UC Berkeley's Seminar for Faculty Who Teach with Graduate Student Instructors

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This chapter describes the results of a research study of University of California, Berkeley's annual seminar for faculty teaching with Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs). It demonstrates that such a faculty development activity can have a significant impact not only on faculty mentoring of GSIs but also on faculty teaching, attitudes, and behaviors vis-à-vis teaching and learning in higher education. The chapter presents an overview of the seminar, a description of the format and methodology of the research project, and qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, research universities in the United States have made a concentrated effort to improve graduate student preparation for teaching. From the first national conferences on teaching assistant (TA) training to the more recent Preparing Future Faculty programs, much

progress has been made in the development of graduate students as teachers.

As evidenced by the table of contents in *The Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants* (Marincovich, Probstko, & Stout, 1998), most of these efforts have focused on what centralized offices and individual departments can do to prepare the future professoriate for teaching. Considerably less attention has been given to the crucial role that front-line faculty play in this pedagogical mentorship. By "front-line" we mean those faculty members who teach lecture courses that utilize Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs). Though they may have taught for many years, these faculty members often have had no formal preparation for teaching and have not received guidance on how to be a pedagogical mentor to graduate students. The mentoring relationship fostered between graduate students and these front-line faculty members is of great importance, as it may be the only opportunity that graduate students have to learn about teaching before assuming faculty positions.

In order to address this need, the University of California, Berkeley's GSI Teaching and Resource Center introduced in 1992 an annual seminar to assist faculty in providing pedagogical mentorship and guidance to GSIs. The goal of the faculty seminar is to bring together a cross-disciplinary group of faculty who meet and work together over the course of three weeks to make their teaching with GSIs more effective and efficient.

Since 1993, the authors of this article have had the opportunity to present on this seminar nationally and internationally (Mintz, 1997; Mintz & von Hoene, 1997; Mintz, von Hoene, Duggan, & Reimer, 1995; Mintz, von Hoene, & Reimer, 1998). Participants at these sessions frequently asked what the long-term impact has been on faculty mentoring of GSIs. Based on this interest, we decided to conduct a research study of the effects of the seminar in spring 1998.

This chapter addresses the results of this research. The first section describes the seminar and its evolution. The next section discusses the instrument that was designed to gather information on the long-term impact of the seminar (Appendix 6.1) and the research employed. We then focus on one section of the research study in which participants were asked what changes took place in how they approach and carry out their mentoring responsibilities as a result of the seminar. In reporting the results of the research study, we use both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

THE FACULTY SEMINAR

The faculty seminar on teaching with GSIs is offered each spring for nine hours (three afternoons over the course of three weeks). Preparation for the faculty seminar begins in the fall. In November, the advisory committee for GSI Affairs contacts department chairs asking them to recommend faculty members who might benefit from such a seminar. The advisory committee is a subcommittee of Berkeley's academic senate and co-sponsors the seminar with the GSI Teaching and Resource Center. Once faculty names are received, we send out invitations. In order to create a working group, only those faculty who are able to attend all three meetings are accepted. In the early years, faculty participants elected to limit the seminar to 20 participants. This ensures small group discussion.

In the fall semester, GSI Teaching and Resource Center staff involved in developing the seminar brainstorm topics, speakers, and activities. We then meet with the individual faculty presenters to develop ideas for each session. In addition to key faculty members, several graduate students are invited to be on a panel at the seminar to discuss their work with faculty. Undergraduates are invited who speak about the impact of GSI teaching on their learning.

In December and January a reader of articles is compiled and a gift book purchased for the participants (e.g., Brookfield, 1995; Cross & Steadman, 1996; Hutchings, 1998; Ramsden, 1992). Though faculty will not have time to read all of this material over the course of the three weeks, the reader and gift book serve as resources for them in later semesters.

The specific topic of the seminar and the activities employed change from year to year. In the first year, for example, the seminar was geared to faculty teaching large lecture courses. In another year, the focus was on learning styles. In yet another year, pedagogical mentorship of GSIs was addressed. In order to model for the faculty participants pedagogically sound approaches that both they and their GSIs alike can utilize in their teaching, interactive methods are employed, such as case studies (e.g., to discuss a GSI/faculty conflict), fish bowls (e.g., to enable one-half of the faculty participants to observe their colleagues participating in a simulated undergraduate learning experience), think/pair/share activities (e.g., to articulate differences in learning styles), free writes (e.g., to consider what constitutes good mentoring), and faculty peer observations, among others. When appropriate, more traditional approaches such as lecture-style presentations are used (e.g., the professional development of

graduate students for teaching) (Cross, 1994) and motivation theory and panel discussions with graduate students and undergraduates (Covington, 1996).

The seminar commences with a welcome from the dean of the graduate division and the chair of the advisory committee for GSI Affairs. The individual seminar sessions are facilitated by the staff of the GSI Teaching and Resource Center with carefully honed presentations and activities led by faculty, campus staff, current graduate students, former graduate students now in teaching positions, undergraduates and, on occasion, experts on teaching and learning from off campus.

The seminar is assessed twice: at the end of the third and final session and at the end of the spring semester when faculty are in a position to report how they have applied what they learned to their work with GSIs.

Since 1994, approximately 110 faculty members attended the seminar. The response to the seminar has been uniformly positive with only one person stating that she or he would not recommend the seminar to a colleague. Though responses have been positive, we also wanted to ascertain the long-term impact on the way faculty work with GSIs on their teaching. This led to a research study in spring semester 1998 to identify what changes, if any, faculty had made in mentoring GSIs.

RESOURCE FORMAT AND METHODOLOGY

The format for our study was a one-hour taped oral interview. This ensured a greater rate of return and enabled interviewers to probe responses during the interview. The questionnaire was developed by staff from the GSI Teaching and Resource Center, two humanists and two social scientists. After developing the instrument, we received input on its design from two colleagues at Berkeley, K. Patricia Cross, Professor Emerita from the Graduate School of Education, and Maresi Nerad, Director of the Graduate Division's Research Unit.

The questionnaire consists of five sections: 1) work with GSIs, 2) information on the faculty seminar and other teaching related seminars, 3) teaching preparation, 4) impact of the seminar, and 5) division of time. Section four of the questionnaire, which asks explicitly about the impact of the seminar, forms the basis of this chapter.

Three staff members from the GSI Teaching and Resource Center conducted and audiotaped the oral interviews. The interviews were coded and transcribed by a project assistant to ensure anonymity.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Of the 110 faculty members who had attended the faculty seminar, 31 were available to participate in our study. Of these, 22 were tenure track, with all but one already tenured. Nine participants were nontenure-track instructors. The group was split evenly between humanities and social sciences on the one hand (15) and sciences and engineering on the other (16). All seven years of the faculty seminar were represented. Twenty-four of the approximately 65 departments or programs that appoint GSIs on the Berkeley campus were represented in the study. Three-fourths of the participants had taught with GSIs for a total of one to 20 semesters, the other fourth for more than 20 semesters.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In section four of the questionnaire, we asked our informants a multipart question about what changes they had made as a result of the faculty seminar. The first several categories address the impact the seminar has had on the pedagogical mentorship that faculty provide GSIs; the remaining categories ask about the impact the seminar may have had on the teaching done by faculty members and the attitudes and behaviors that characterize their relationship to teaching. We discuss our findings within these two broad categories.

IMPACT OF THE SEMINAR ON FACULTY MENTORSHIP OF GSIs

Content of the Meetings

Sixty-six percent of the participants in the study had made significant changes in the content of their weekly meetings with GSIs. Two overall changes occurred. First, respondents themselves seemed to have changed their attitudes toward the importance of the weekly meetings in preparing GSIs for teaching by indicating that they were now utilizing the weekly meetings more consciously as an opportunity for mentoring. Respondents used terms such as "more structured," "more official," "more formal," and "more focused," and that they had become "more directive" and "more explicit about expectations." The second major change was that the meetings were now devoted much more to discussing issues of teaching and learning as opposed to logistics. Several informants stated that the discussion was less about nuts and bolts and included complex issues such as teaching a diverse group of students.

When asked explicitly whether the weekly meetings now included a greater focus on pedagogy versus logistics, 66% indicated yes. One respondent described the shift in these terms: "Before it was 100% to 0 [logistics to pedagogy], now it is 80% to 20%."

Assessment of GSIs

Though all GSIs receive feedback from their students at the end of the semester at Berkeley, faculty have traditionally been less involved in GSI assessment. We found that as a result of the faculty seminar, this had indeed shifted. Approximately 50% of the participants in the study stated that they had become more involved in issues of GSI assessment. This involvement took different forms. Some had begun to observe their GSIs in the classroom. Others encouraged their GSIs to be videotaped and to participate in peer observation. Most frequently, the respondents indicated that they were discussing evaluation much more with their GSIs.

Collaboration in Course Design and Delivery

Forty-two percent of the respondents stated that they now welcome greater collaboration in course design as a result of the faculty seminar. This suggested that faculty valued graduate student input and had begun to understand the need to give graduate students more substantive opportunities in teaching that resemble what they will be expected to do as new assistant professors. The form which this collaboration took varied. Some gave GSIs the opportunity to give lectures. Others invited contributions to worksheets and homework sets. Another asked students to think not only about what they would put on a syllabus for a similar course if they were to teach it, but more importantly, why: "As a result of the seminar . . . I've had them [GSIs] make up a syllabus as if they were the sole instructor for the course and review its content . . . I ask the students if they were teaching the course what textbook they would choose and why, and then we would have a dialogue about that." One respondent stated that she or he invited graduate students to give a lecture "as a result of my greater understanding that learning how to teach is at the core of being a doctoral student."

Frequency and Length of Meetings

The goals of the faculty seminar are to make teaching with GSIs more effective and more efficient. For that reason, we were particularly interested in ascertaining whether greater focus on providing pedagogical mentorship would translate into more time required on the part of the faculty

member. This research confirmed that the quality of time spent mentoring GSIs increased more than the quantity of time. Thirty-nine percent stated that the frequency of meetings had increased. No respondent indicated that this was negative. For some respondents, increased frequency of meetings enabled the introduction of a more predictable structure in which to discuss pedagogy: "Prior to the faculty seminar, meetings with GSIs were infrequent and sporadic and almost always related to administrative matters. . . . [Now I hold] regular meetings in which time is devoted to pedagogy and its application to that particular course as well as separate time devoted toward administrative matters." The increased frequency of meetings seemed to be an investment into making the teaching of the course and the relationship to the GSIs more satisfying. Some indicated that they now held a presemester meeting to get the GSIs prepared for teaching.

Time Spent Mentoring GSIs

Thirty-five percent had increased the amount of time mentoring GSIs while 65% had not. When comparing the data on changes made in the content of the weekly meetings (66% with greater focus on pedagogy), the increased focus on assessment of GSIs (45%), the increase in opportunities for GSIs to contribute course design (42%), and the overall increase in time spent mentoring GSIs (33%), it is apparent that the quality of pedagogical mentoring has increased far more than the time spent mentoring GSIs. These data suggest that faculty mentorship of GSIs is both more effective and more efficient.

Impact of the Faculty Seminar on Faculty Development

Though the faculty seminar has focused primarily on how faculty can work more effectively and efficiently with GSIs, there were significant secondary gains derived by faculty early on in the process. At this research university, faculty do not often seek out activities for their own pedagogical development. The rewards system at Berkeley encourages faculty to spend far more time on their research than on their teaching. Boyer (1990) asserts, however—and this concurs with our findings as well—when asked, many faculty admit wanting to devote more time than they currently do to teaching. Faculty have also stated that they run the risk of becoming stigmatized if they demonstrate too much enthusiasm for teaching. Though many faculty members attend the seminar for the express purpose of doing a better job in teaching with GSIs, our research study demonstrated clearly that faculty attitudes to teaching and learning

in higher education, their philosophies of teaching and learning, and even their engagement with the literature on pedagogy were positively impacted by the seminar. These secondary gains described below are a significant outcome of the seminar.

Teaching of Undergraduate Courses

Fifty percent of our respondents indicated that as a result of the faculty seminar they had made changes in the methods they use to teach undergraduates. These changes were primarily in three areas: more interactive teaching, increased attention to assessment and ongoing feedback, and a greater attentiveness to diversity. One respondent underlined the increased degree of consciousness that she or he brings to teaching as a result of the seminar: "I am more conscious of the rationale for assignments and how they fit into course objectives."

Teaching of Graduate Level Courses

As might be expected, there was less impact of the seminar on the manner in which faculty teach graduate level courses. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that a full 33% of the respondents indicated that they had made changes to the methods they employ in teaching graduate courses as a result of the seminar. These changes were similar to those that were made in the undergraduate courses: more class involvement, less lecturing and coverage, attentiveness to differences in learning styles, and seeking out early feedback.

Level of Interest in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents stated that as a result of the faculty seminar their level of interest in teaching and learning in higher education had increased. Some stated that they were more interested and more aware of pedagogical issues and resources. Others felt they had begun to understand that teaching is a complex process that involves effort.

Involvement in Teaching Related Activities

Faculty interviewed indicated a greater involvement in teaching and learning activities since the seminar. Although interest in some of these activities may have antedated the faculty seminar, 25% of the respondents indicated that they were participating in writing projects pertaining to pedagogy, and 66% stated that they were reading more in the pedagogical literature. In addition, 50% of the participants reported increased

involvement in departmental, campus, and national activities pertaining to teaching and learning and preparing graduate students for teaching. Some participants began to serve as members of departmental or campus-wide committees involving preparing graduate students for teaching. One stated that she or he had begun teaching the departmental pedagogy seminar for GSIs as a result of the faculty seminar. Because of a seminar segment on the teaching portfolio, some faculty respondents stated that they had recommended the job search process in their departments be changed to include teaching portfolios.

Impact on Philosophy of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

In addition to the more tangible results described above, 55% of the participants revealed that as a result of the faculty seminar their philosophies of teaching and learning had changed. Many of the statements made by the respondents and the changes that had occurred in their philosophies of teaching and learning reflected an integration of recent pedagogical theory that stresses collaboration, deep learning, reflective practice, and a student-centered classroom. For example, one respondent began to look at learning as a cooperative arrangement and stated: "It's not just me throwing information at them, but it is learning together. I will get the most out of my teaching if we learn cooperatively. I am teaching the students how to learn, but we all do it together. It's not just me tossing bones to the dogs." Another described the shift as follows: "Focusing on student learning and asking at every point how do we best help the students learn is really a different question than how do I best teach this material, how do I get up and explain it as clearly as I can?" Another stressed that she or he was "paying more attention to deep learning issues" and placed more value on ongoing evaluation and fostering "better communication among GSIs themselves."

Other respondents described shifts in their pedagogical thinking in affective and developmental terms. For example, one described his or her experience with the seminar as "a ripening." Another described his approach to teaching along the lines of Perry's (1970) developmental stages by stating that she or he had "become much clearer of the fact that there are no right and wrong ways" but that teaching is instead "an open process . . . in which you aren't the center." Still other respondents mentioned that the seminar had enabled them to see teaching more from the GSIs' point of view and that it had enabled them to appreciate GSI roles and capabilities. Seeing the process through the eyes of the GSIs, one re-

spondent stated that it "made me try to make the work more worthwhile." The seminar also seemed to give faculty a language for discussing teaching and learning. One put it this way: "The faculty seminar gave me a vocabulary and philosophy to discuss my teaching and learning interests with GSIs." Another stated that it had enabled him/her to "think about my legacy as an educator."

CONCLUSION: THE ENLIGHTENMENT EFFECT

Though many of these affective outcomes might be viewed as intangible, they reflect a very important shift in attitude toward teaching among faculty and should be viewed as a result of the faculty seminar. In the process of conducting our interviews, one of the participants in the study referred to a concept from the field of social science research to describe the nonlinear, somewhat diffuse impact the seminar had on her. She explained that the seminar had an "enlightenment" effect on her teaching and her work with GSIs. Applied to the context of social science research and policymaking (Janowitz, 1970), this concept, described in an article written by Carol Weiss (1977), suggests that "the major effect of research on policy may be the gradual sedimentation of insights, theories, concepts, and ways of looking at the world" (p. 535). Though the participants in our study were able to attribute changes in their work with GSIs and in their own teaching to the faculty seminar, the greatest achievement has been, in our opinion, the enlightenment function of the seminar.

Through the seminar, participants took part in a process that led to major shifts in their attitudes toward teaching and preparing graduate students to teach, and enabled them to be "receptive to widened horizons and untraditional angles of vision" (Weiss, 1997, p. 545). It is our belief that graduate student mentoring, undergraduate education, and the campus culture for teaching and learning are benefiting from these new attitudes and practices that have resulted from the seminar and its enlightenment effect.

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APPENDIX 6.1

FACULTY SEMINAR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*Name: _____

*Title: _____

*Department: _____

*Year seminar was attended: _____

*Focus of Faculty Seminar that year: _____

*Interviewer: _____

*Date: _____

Part 1: Work with GSIs

- 1) Are you currently teaching with GSIs?
- 2) Are you currently working with GSIs as a faculty adviser for GSI affairs, pedagogy seminar instructor, or some other capacity?
- 3) In past semesters have you worked with GSIs in any of the capacities mentioned above:

Faculty adviser for GSI affairs _____ # of times _____

Pedagogy seminar instructor _____ # of times _____

Other _____

Part 2: Information on Faculty Seminar and other Teaching Related Seminars

- 4) Prior to the faculty seminar had you attended any workshops, conferences, or seminars that focused on teaching issues?
yes _____ no _____
- ** If yes, can you provide the names of the seminars/conferences and when and where they took place?
- 5) Since attending the faculty seminar have you attended any workshops, conferences, or seminars that focus on teaching issues?
yes _____ no _____

- ** If yes, can you provide the names of the seminars/conferences and when and where they took place?

Part 3: Teaching Preparation

- 6) While in graduate school, were you a graduate student instructor or TA?

yes _____ no _____

If yes, how many times did you teach?

- 7) As a TA or GSI in graduate school, did you teach with a primary instructor?

- 8) As a graduate student did you ever have complete responsibility for teaching a course, including designing the syllabus?

yes _____ no _____

If yes, could you please describe the circumstances?

- 9) Did you ever teach a stand-alone course in which you were the sole instructor but were not responsible for course design and curriculum?

yes _____ no _____

- 10) As a graduate student did you receive any preparation for teaching through your university such as:

Orientations for new GSIs _____

Workshops or other seminars on teaching _____

Observation and feedback _____

Individual mentoring by a faculty member _____

Other _____

If any of the above are checked, what did you take away from that experience?

- 11) Did you feel prepared for your teaching responsibilities when you first began to teach as a graduate student?

yes _____ no _____

Please explain.

- 12) Did you feel prepared for your teaching responsibilities when you began teaching as a faculty member?

yes _____ no _____

Please explain. _____

- 13) Did you feel prepared to teach with GSIs at Berkeley?

yes _____ no _____

Please explain.

- 14) How did you know what to do when you began working with GSIs?

- 15) What did you find to be the most rewarding aspect of working with GSIs when you first began?

Is this different now?

- 16) What did you find to be the most difficult aspect of working with GSIs when you first began?

Is this different now?

Part 4: Impact of the Seminar

- 17) What were your primary motivations for attending the faculty seminar?

- 18) Would you describe for me what you believe has been the overall impact of the faculty seminar on you?

- 19) Were there any specific aspects of the seminar that you believe were particularly beneficial?

- 20) As a result of attending the faculty seminar have you made any changes in regard to your work with GSIs in the following areas?

Frequency and length of meetings with GSIs

Content of meetings

Distribution of how time is spent in meetings on logistics versus pedagogy

Nature and extent of collaboration in course design and delivery

Assessment of GSIs as teachers (classroom observation, videotaping, conferencing)

The amount of time spent mentoring GSIs

Have you made changes in any other area as the result of the faculty seminar that you would like to mention?

- 21) As a result of attending the faculty seminar has anything changed in regard to your teaching methods or teaching style in courses with undergraduates?

yes _____ no _____

If yes, in what way(s)?

- 22) As a result of attending the seminar has anything changed in regard to your teaching methods or teaching style in the graduate level courses you teach?

yes _____ no _____

If yes, in what way(s)?

- 23) As a result of attending the faculty seminar has your level of interest changed in issues of teaching and learning in higher education?

yes _____ no _____

- 24) As a result of the seminar, have you done any of the following?

Read about teaching in books and journal articles _____

Written, presented, or published on teaching _____

Contributed to campus department or professional association activities on teaching _____

Contributed to campus department or professional association activities vis-à-vis GSIs _____

- 25) As a result of attending the faculty seminar has there been a change in your philosophy of teaching and learning in higher education?

yes _____ no _____

If yes, in what way(s)?

Part 5: Division of Time

(Give the faculty member two pieces of paper with a circle drawn on each piece.) If you were asked to make up a pie drawing representing how you currently spend your time in the following areas, how would you divide up the pie? Please indicate the percentage of the pie currently taken up by each activity.

- I. Teaching
- II. Mentoring
 - Undergraduate students
 - Graduate students
 - GSIs
- III. Research
- IV. Service
 - Departmental committees
 - Campus-wide committee work
 - Professional associations
- V. Work as an administrator
- VI. Other (please explain)

Please say a few words about this division of responsibilities.

Now, take the second pie. How would you like the pie to be divided? Please indicate the percentages as you would ideally like to see your time distributed.

Please say a few words about this division of responsibilities.

Part VI: Academic and Professional Background

Undergraduate degree from: _____

Graduate degree from: _____

Length of time on faculty at Berkeley: _____

Have you taught as a faculty member at other schools before Berkeley?

If so, where? _____

For how long? _____

Did you work with GSIs/TAs? _____

Is there anything else that you would like to say that you have not been specifically asked to address?

* To be filled in by interviewer

** Can call people back on this if necessary