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The Use of Professional Seminars To Prepare Future Faculty for Teaching Basic Communication Courses

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The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools launched Preparing Future Faculty programs in 1993 to enrich doctoral education across disciplines (Adams, 2002). Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs emerged within a larger context of national reform that sought both to re-envision relationships between higher education and society, and to re-conceptualize relationships between institutions of higher education with varying missions (Applegate, 2002). Specifically, PFF programs were constructed as spaces for students and teachers to dialogue about the inter-related responsibilities of academic life in hopes that future faculty would be better equipped to participate in and shape the academy and host communities. Financial support for PFF programs in the Communication discipline originally derived from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the National Communication Association. By the turn of the 21st century, however, monies had dwindled and our discipline was left with raised consciousness but a lack of financial support for implementing change. Doctoral granting institutions

across the nation were encouraged to craft curricula that meet the needs of various stakeholders. In the following pages, we present a multi-vocal story of one such institution, the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University, and how our institution has revised graduate education in part to better prepare future faculty to teach the basic communication course and to understand this responsibility as inter-related with research and service.

The faculty in the School of Communication Studies began deliberations about the school's graduate curriculum in 2001, and launched a revised doctoral program in the fall of 2004. The program consists of a core sequence of classes including sixteen credit hours of communication theory, sixteen credit hours of research design, and six credit hours of professional seminar. Students also pursue specialized concentrations in rhetoric and public culture, relating and organizing, and/or health communication. This essay focuses on one aspect of the revised curriculum: a series of one credit hour professional seminars students take part in during the first six quarters of their program of study. Specifically, we focus on the first year of professional seminars with an eye towards how they provide a model for preparing future faculty to teach basic communication courses.

Collectively, the professional seminars orient students to graduate school and provide forums to dialogue about what it means to be a scholar, teacher, citizen, and communication practitioner. The first year of professional seminars introduce students to school faculty and how such faculty members live the life of the mind through teaching, research, consulting, and service. Ad-

ditionally, students explore the inter-relationships among the various academic responsibilities that are common to nearly all university settings. The primary area of focus for the first three professional seminars is pedagogy and learning, including but not limited to the following areas: the creation of learning communities, perspectives on teaching and paradigms of knowledge and instruction, goals of communication education, assessment in communication education, teacher and learner styles, and key challenges facing communication educators. We focus in this essay on three substantive accomplishments of these professional seminars that merit attention because of their ramifications for how we teach and learn in basic communication courses: (1) accomplishing teaching, research, and service as inter-related scholarly acts, (2) interlacing stories of our discipline with stories of learners' lives, and (3) providing institutionalized support for teaching and learning. Additionally, we offer example reading lists and assignment sheets (see Appendices A, B, and C) in hopes that such resources might prove useful for other graduate programs committed to holistic preparation for students entering the academy.

INTER-RELATED SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES: TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

Embarking upon a graduate program was for me, like many others, both exciting and overwhelming. In addition to course work and research projects, I was looking forward to and nervous about teaching public speaking for the first time. As the academic year got underway, I found myself looking forward to our Fri-

day afternoon professional seminar class. While we each had faced different challenges and triumphs in the classroom throughout the week we rarely had the opportunity or time to discuss ideas or issues surrounding the scholarship of teaching. At the end of the year, as I was writing my teaching philosophy for a professional seminar assignment, I realized that what I was writing was a culmination of both my experiences in the classroom and our discussions in professional seminar. While my teaching philosophy will undoubtedly shift and change in years to come, I have had significant guidance in understanding teaching as a scholarly act. — Stephanie

Through the practices and patterns of the professional seminars, the instructor, Lynn, and students alike worked to articulate their understandings of the academy and the professoriate. Although the class generally approached scholarship as a career of learning through teaching, research, and service (see Mahoney, 1997), Lynn invited students to begin to discover what scholarship means within the context of their professional lives. Ernest Boyer's (1990) treatise, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, provided a springboard for dialogue about what it means to be a scholar and how scholarship can be assessed (see also Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997). Boyer's work provided a framework for understanding how discovery (i.e., research), teaching, integration, and application represent four inter-related scholarly functions of the professoriate. Participants thought critically about political, cultural, historical, and social exigencies that privileged certain definitions of scholarship (e.g., McMillan & Cheney's, 1996, discussion of consumerism and its

influence on how scholarship is practiced), and in so doing reclaimed teaching as a scholarly act.

As faculty architects of the professional seminar series, Beth and Lynn were acutely aware of how pedagogical concerns generally remain on the periphery rather than at the center of graduate education. As a result, students too often leave graduate school and enter the professoriate unable to articulate the scholarly nature of teaching and learning and ill-prepared for managing the inter-related responsibilities of teaching, research, and service. Like the PFF program in which Lynn participated at the University of Nebraska, the professional seminars at Ohio University were designed with the goal of helping students develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to approach teaching in general and teaching the basic communication course specifically as scholarly enterprises (see Appendix A for reading list). What is your philosophy of learning? How ought knowledge be constructed? What is the role of educators and students in learning? How ought the scholarly nature of teaching and learning be assessed? Who are the primary stakeholders of the academy? What resources are needed to live fluid and blurred boundaries between teaching, research, and service? How can students and professors alike manage competing and colliding responsibilities? These questions served as guiding beacons throughout the seminars. At the end of year one, students were asked to articulate a statement of scholarly interests including their research agenda and teaching and learning philosophy (See Appendix B for assignments sheets).

By instituting the space for us to examine the scholarly art of teaching, professional seminar perpetuated an

integrative perspective on teaching, learning, and research. While we each grappled individually with our emerging pedagogical identities, we also were challenged to consider the connectedness of teaching and research and to explore the ways in which the unique research subject matter of our field intersects with experiences in the classroom. This allowed us to gain realistic insight into our future roles as faculty members and to address the tensions that permeate the relationship between teaching and research. Openly discussing the choices that faculty must make in managing these tensions enabled us to voice our questions, concerns, and opinions about how one manages priorities that shift and change throughout an academic career. — Stephanie and Daniel

INTERLACING STORIES OF A DISCIPLINE AND STORIES OF LEARNERS' LIVES

I have always experienced intellectual curiosity and learning as storied performances that unfold in myriad settings and whose meanings shift across time and space. Some characters I have met only through their writings or research texts—distant yet kindred spirits who have inspired students and me to pay closer attention to our taken-for-granted worlds, see again and greet anew self and other. Other characters, students and colleagues alike, actively have participated in the co-creation of textured and multi-layered spaces of knowing and being. Such was the case with the professional seminars. I experienced professional seminar as a web of interlacing stories – stories of our discipline and the academy, stories of students' lives, and my own shifting autobiography. In our finest moments, we

modeled a reflexive relationship between theory and praxis. It was one of the greatest highlights of my career thus far to stand amidst these stories and bear witness to students as they started to discover their disciplinary callings. — Lynn

The professional seminars encouraged students to begin to think holistically about the scholarship of teaching, research, and service. Likewise, the seminars encouraged students to connect self with subject matter. Guided by the work of Parker Palmer (1998), *The Courage to Teach*, students wrestled with the intertextual nature of knowledge construction. Following Palmer's lead, students explored the cherished stories of the discipline that they were teaching in their classes (and reading about in graduate level theory and methods courses) and the stories of their lives. All stories derive their meaning in part from their relationship to other stories (i.e., intertextuality), and Palmer provided a language for making sense of the "big stories" of disciplines and the "little stories" of people's lives.

Through reading and discussing John Dewey's (1916/1944) *Democracy and Education*, along with other preeminent writers on teaching and communication education, students were exposed to a variety of orientations towards education. Not only did students explore philosophies of education, they also dealt with the evolving role of communication in higher education. The professional seminars created space for participants openly and honestly to discuss obstacles as well as opportunities for communication scholars. Cohen's (1994) text *The history of speech communication: The emergence of a discipline* usefully charted the birth of our discipline and allowed students to understand the his-

torical roots of contemporary successes and challenges. Engaging in these readings while at the same time teaching public speaking allowed participants to connect their lived teaching experiences to an understanding of their own philosophical underpinnings and the history of their chosen discipline. Course readings served as springboards for discussing challenges confronting students as they progress through graduate school and plan for careers beyond graduate school. Students were challenged through class discussions, readings, and reflective essays to look inwardly in exploring their motivations to learn and to teach.

The professional seminars allowed us to share our teaching and learning experiences in a supportive environment while at the same time challenging us to question and express our emerging identities as teachers. Additionally, the professional seminars provided a structured space wherein we could discuss and learn from each other about the scholarship of teaching and learning and develop our individual understandings of what it means to lead the life of the mind. Our learning experience was driven by the notion that as educators and future faculty members, there are important questions that we should be wrestling with by looking both inwardly to our own beliefs and outwardly to scholarly resources. — Stephanie and Daniel

INSTITUTIONALIZED SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I remember it well. I was a first year Ph.D. student at Kent State and this was my first NCA (then SCA) paper submission. It was very exciting to think that

something I wrote could be, perhaps, competitively chosen for presentation at the upcoming conference in Chicago. I assembled the copies of the paper, crafted a letter, and sent it off—to the SCA office in Annandale, Virginia! I wasn't aware that there were divisions and elected chairpersons to whom one sent a paper. I thought simply addressing my submission to the national association office was sufficient. Years later, with a few successful paper submissions behind me, I am still teased about my misguided paper submission attempt. From firsthand experience I realized that graduate students would benefit from being socialized into the academy through participation in our professional associations. But the question remained, how best to frame this socialization activity? What form would it take? Our faculty had wrestled with the notion of requiring graduate students to attend a weekly colloquium, but this seemed too loose and unstructured an activity to accomplish our goals. After several very long faculty meetings we agreed that we would offer, for credit, a course, later titled Professional Seminar, whose aim was to socialize students into the academic community and to institutionalize support for ongoing professional development. — Beth

Boyer (1990) and Palmer (1998) noted the isolation that educators and graduate students often experience, and urged individuals in the academy to create communities of reciprocity and social support. By institutionalizing a space for ongoing professional development, students were able to ask questions and share with each other both positive and negative experiences in an environment where they were not being evaluated on their scholarly performance. Students were free to ask questions like: “When should I start submitting papers to

conferences?” “How does the submission process work?” and “What does NCA stand for?” Importantly, professional seminars also institutionalized support for pedagogy. For example, through a required assignment, Promising Pedagogical Practices (See Appendix C for assignment sheet), participants each had the opportunity to present a best practice for teaching the basic communication course. This free interplay of ideas stimulated participants to question their own teaching experiences and expand their repertoire of teaching ideas. Five participants went on to publish their Promising Pedagogical Practices in *Teaching Ideas for the Basic Communication Course* (2005) edited by Barbara Hugenberg and Larry Hugenberg. Furthermore, participants actively engaged in discussing issues of teaching as a public activity, the evaluative nature of teaching, and the risks and vulnerabilities that accompany learning in public (see Weick, 1997). As participants realized the common challenges they faced, the professional seminars facilitated an atmosphere of support not only between professor and graduate students, but also among graduate students.

Both in its structure and in its tone, the professional seminar encouraged tangible and active mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students. In so doing, the seminar offered multiple resources to students desiring to learn from faculty who are rich in experience and knowledge. Each week, various faculty members would attend the seminar and share a narrative account of their history, interests, and projects. The seminars prioritized the fostering of such relationships and provided a means for initiating them. As a direct result, the spirit and outcomes of professional seminar

regularly transcended the bounds of this particular course. For insofar as faculty encouraged and undertook such mentoring relationships, the seminar itself served as merely a starting point from which ongoing relationships have emerged. Whether writing together, teaching together, or simply sharing in edifying dialogue, such relationships offer helpful and sustained resources to graduate students who are beginning to find their own place within our discipline.

Of course, not all professional relationships in the academy are enriching or easy to navigate, and Beth and Lynn struggled with how to address the dark and comedic aspects of academic life. We busied ourselves developing a set of course readings that illustrate the tools of the trade: the rigors of research, the satisfaction of teaching, the fulfillment that service brings, and the need to balance the three. We identified a wealth of resources for students to read; and yet, something was missing. We couldn't immediately identify what that was, but we were falling a bit short in our representation of what it means to be a faculty member. After multiple discussions, we realized that what was missing was the *folly* of it all. The sheer fun of becoming part of something new—and odd—could not be captured in treatises devoted to a serious consideration of the multiple ways we enact scholarship. The politics of academic life and the (dis)empowering nature of workplace relationships were absent from the reading list. That's when the satirical novel *Straight Man*, by Richard Russo (1997), was introduced as a vehicle to assist us in bringing to life the very real and often absurd aspects of academic life.

The hero of *Straight Man*, Hank, is a reluctant department chair of a rather dysfunctional English Department, who threatens to kill a goose each day he is not given a budget for the upcoming school year. Although Russo's book is not a scholarly tome, there is much to be learned about academic life from a man who provokes a fellow faculty member into throwing a notebook at him only to have the spiral binding get caught on his nose. Hank refuses to look too deeply into issues but rather he relies on Occam's Razor as his guiding philosophy, which translates as "the simplest explanation is often the best explanation." In Hank's case, the simplest explanation of academe is its absurdity at times. Hank reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously as he muses over the irony of his secretary getting published before most of his faculty. Yet Hank attends to the needs of a disturbed student and rescues the career of a colleague while simultaneously finding himself submerged in a hot tub with a faculty member known to be a sexual harasser and a voluptuous female reporter. Despite appearances, Hank is a moral man and devoted husband and father. Perhaps this is the gift of *Straight Man*, as Hank reminds us. Things are often not as they appear, and they are rarely as complicated as they seem. When Hank uses Occam's Razor, it cuts both ways, reminding us to put things into perspective, especially ourselves. In short, participants read and reflected on the novel as a way to talk about the politics and craziness of teaching and learning in the academy.

CONCLUSION

Becoming an excellent scholar requires, of course, that one learn how to negotiate and accomplish the various professional responsibilities that accompany our field. Whether it be submitting one's first article for publication, creating one's vitae, figuring out how to find one's scholarly voice, or understanding what it means to conduct oneself as a professional in meetings with one's peers—each of these benefit from close guidance. Professional seminar situated each of these matters within a broader and integrated whole. Writing ought not be considered apart from educating, and the construction of a vitae need be as purposive and thoughtful as one's theoretical contributions to the field. For each of these in their own way play a role in the creation of whole and professional scholars. Much time in professional seminar was spent thinking about how best to undertake such responsibilities. Participants read about what it meant to perform oneself through his or her vitae, talked at length about how one ought to conduct him or herself in the classroom, and discussed the often daunting task of putting illusive ideas to paper. Participants learned both from established scholars and from one another how to negotiate the various steps of the publication process. Finally, participants talked about writing abstracts, presenting papers, and networking with others who can assist us in such undertakings. And in each and every case, participants sought to understand the necessarily integrated nature of these various means of being a scholar.

In these ways, the professional seminars institutionalize a space for thinking about such matters in community, and provide students with numerous and valuable resources from which to forge the beginnings of enriching and fulfilling careers as scholars. The Basic Communication Course is privileged alongside students' developing research agendas. The stories of graduate teaching assistants' lives are cherished alongside the stories or theories of our discipline. The first cohort of students in the school's new program are now enrolled in year two of our professional seminars. These seminars focus on issues related to research and service, including the academic publishing process, sharing scholarly work beyond academic venues, consulting, and funding opportunities for research. At the end of three years in the doctoral program, students will participate in a comprehensive scholarly portfolio assessment. This comprehensive process, like the professional seminars, assesses the various ways students engage in scholarship — teaching, research, and service. It is our hope that the professional seminars prepare students to succeed in this assessment and beyond.

Becoming an excellent scholar-teacher is a project that demands the sustained efforts of a lifetime. Consequently, professional seminar, can in no way complete this process. What it can do—and has begun to do in this particular instance—is to provide students with an orientation to the matters at hand. As I am using it here, the term 'orientation' is understood in two ways. First of all, the professional seminar serves to introduce students to the vast amount of issues and concerns that should occupy a young communication scholar. Secondly, however, the professional seminar

serves as an agent of socialization, providing students with a way of viewing the role of the scholar-teacher. Considered from this angle, the professional seminar prepares future faculty to embrace a more realistic, holistic, and optimistic vision of what it means to be an excellent and productive educator. The professional seminar, as I have experienced it, therefore allows me to think about what it means to be an excellent scholar-teacher, and has provided resources for meta-thinking about the same. That is, the course has allowed me to begin the process of thinking about how I conceive of the life of the scholar-teacher. In so doing, the professional seminar offers rich and important resources and skills that will be valuable throughout the course of an entire career. — Daniel

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APPENDIX A

COURSE READINGS FOR YEAR ONE, PROFESSIONAL SEMINARS

Fall Term

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (pp. 130-150).

Dewey, J. (1916/1944). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: The Free Press.

Mahoney, T. (1997). Scholarship as a career of learning through research and teaching. In R. Andre and P. Frost (Eds.), *Researchers hooked on teaching. Noted scholars discuss the synergies of teaching and research* (pp. 112-124). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Winter Term

Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. New York: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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Spring Term

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APPENDIX B

ASSIGNMENT SHEETS

SCHOLARLY PORTFOLIO

As you know, faculty members have adopted a portfolio system to assess your scholarly development and readiness to complete a dissertation. This portfolio assessment will take place at the end of your third year in graduate school. In order to encourage you to start reflecting on some elements of the portfolio, you will complete a draft of the following portfolio items as part of your pro-seminar responsibilities this quarter. These statements will no doubt shift and evolve as you continue to mature as a scholar.

- a. Statement about your program of research** — no more than 2-3 pages; you should describe the programs of research you wish to develop as you matriculate through your doctoral studies including theoretical interests, methodological expertise you seek to develop, research questions of most interest to you at this point; importantly, start to situate yourself in the broader landscape of knowledge patterns and practices of the communication discipline (and beyond disciplinary “boundaries” as appropriate); I hope that in two years, each of you can look back at this initial statement about your research interests and identify shifts and successes; I encourage you to share this statement with your advisor and program of study committee members.

- b. Teaching and learning philosophy or leadership philosophy** — no more than 2 pages; you should articulate how you understand education and the learning process, the role of teachers and students in learning, the nexus between teaching and other scholarly activities, etc. If you are not teaching, you can re-envision this statement to reflect your professional responsibilities (e.g., what is your philosophy in enacting your position as a forensics coach, a residence hall director, etc.).
- c. Evidence of teaching effectiveness or other evidence of professional effectiveness** — summary of numerical and qualitative student feedback; letters from the basic course director about teaching performance; peer feedback. Again, if you are not teaching, then talk with me about alternative measures of your professional effectiveness.
- d. Academic Vita**

APPENDIX C

PROMISING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Throughout the quarter, we will share promising pedagogical practices (e.g., class activities, innovative lesson plans, ways to engage students in learning). I expect everyone to share at least one promising practice through the course of the quarter. I have designed a temporally-based structure for sharing promising practices based on the Public Speaking syllabus. For example, the week before audience analysis is covered in the Public Speaking course we will share promising practices that relate to audience analysis in hopes that the discussion will help you as you prepare lesson plans. I will have a sign-up sheet on my office door; at your convenience, sign up for a time formally to share a promising practice. I encourage you to bring copies of handouts, etc., for classmates as appropriate. In sharing your promising practice, briefly talk about its objectives and relation to course material, how the practice unfolds, and how (if at all) you assess learning outcomes. Your presentation should be no longer than 5 minutes. Although the sign-up sheet will serve as a guide for the discussion, I want you to feel free to share ideas spontaneously as the spirit moves you in class discussion.