

# AAHE *Bulletin*

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# Preparing Future Faculty — Faster

## *A Crash Course Guides Students to the Professoriate*

By Constance E. Cook, Matthew Kaplan,  
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**N**ationwide, university-based initiatives to prepare graduate students for their future roles as faculty members are gaining in popularity. More than 300 institutions currently participate in programs on Preparing Future Faculty (PFF), launched initially by the Association of American Colleges & Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools. These programs introduce graduate students interested in faculty careers to issues in college teaching and faculty worklife in nonresearch university settings.

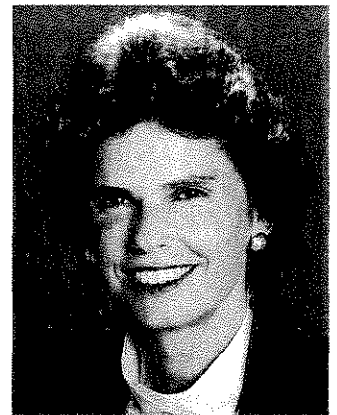
Although overwhelmingly successful, there is considerable concern about whether PFF programs will lengthen graduate students' time to degree or interfere with their academic course work. A look at the PFF website ([www.preparing-faculty.org](http://www.preparing-faculty.org)) shows that many

initiatives last up to a year, and several take place during the fall or winter academic calendar. However, the University of Michigan has a program that shows it is possible to reap the positive benefits of PFF initiatives without conflicting with academic schedules.

Its Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) and the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies (Rackham) have organized the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching, which prepares a select group of graduate students for their first faculty jobs and enhances their teaching experiences as graduate students. The five-week Seminar takes place when most graduate students are not teaching or completing coursework — early summer vacation, just after the end of the winter term. Assessment of the Seminar's participants indicates that it reaps benefits similar to those elicited by PFF initiatives of a longer duration, without the drawbacks.

### **Developing the Seminar Curriculum**

Planning for the annual Seminar began in October 1998 with the distribution of an email survey to Rackham's 6,000 graduate students. More than 600 responded to this single email message, and they provided useful guidance on the content, timing, duration, and demand for the Seminar. Relying upon these data, CRLT and Rackham staff, with one faculty member from the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, planned the Seminar with three central components:



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1. Preparation for the academic job search, including assistance with the creation of a statement of teaching philosophy, a teaching portfolio, and a syllabus.
2. Information about higher education (e.g., institutional types, governance and accountability, the nature of today's students, tenure, and faculty worklife), including field trips to local college campuses.

3. Discussion of effective and reflective teaching, including meetings with teaching award-winning University of Michigan faculty members, conversations about multicultural teaching and learning, and demonstration of and reflection on the use of instructional technology.

In addition to attendance at 10 half-day sessions, participants read and discuss a carefully selected collection of readings that address the topics above (see [www.crlt.umich.edu/teaching\\_seminar.html](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/teaching_seminar.html) for a full list of readings) and create their own statement of teaching philosophy, teaching portfolio, and syllabus. Those who successfully complete all Seminar requirements receive a certificate signifying that they are Michigan Teaching Fellows.

The Seminar has been offered twice so far, in May 2000 and May 2001. It attracts graduate students from varied disciplinary backgrounds, with diverse faculty career interests. The selection process is carefully designed to include a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Of the 100 applicants each year, 40 were selected to participate (see Table 1 for disciplinary representation of participants in both years' Seminars).



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### Seminar Content

The Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching occurs during a five-week period beginning in May. Early topics (see Table Two) in the program include both higher education issues (the Carnegie classification and changing student demographics) and an introduction to course planning, teaching portfolios, and teaching philosophies, to give participants a foundation for constructing their own documents. The first half of the Seminar also addresses issues of diversity, both in the U.S. system of higher education and among contemporary college student populations, and topics of concern to faculty, such as academic accountability, academic freedom, and student outcomes assessment. To gain additional perspectives, participants meet with faculty members from a local community college, visit local campuses (both liberal arts colleges and master's institutions),

have an electronic exchange with a leader of a for-profit institution, and speak with award-winning University of Michigan faculty about their teaching philosophies.

The next section focuses on multicultural teaching and learning, in which Seminar participants are treated to a performance of the CRLT Players, an interactive theater troupe that enacts scenarios involving gender dynamics in the classroom. A subsequent session addresses faculty worklife, including workload expectations at different types of institutions, tenure processes, and the experiences of women and people of color in academia. The final week focuses on instructional technology, namely its promise and impact. The Seminar concludes with critique and discussion of course syllabi, and all participants present their teaching portfolios at a Portfolio Fair.

**Table One: Disciplinary Affiliations of Seminar Participants, 2000–2001**

	Participants from	
	May 2000*	May 2001
Biological and Health Sciences	13%	16%
Physical Sciences and Engineering	30%	13%
Social Sciences	33%	32%
Humanities and the Arts	25%	39%

\*Percentages reflect that one participant was affiliated with programs in two disciplinary categories.

Before each Seminar began, participants completed an online survey about their teaching backgrounds and career plans. Most participants reported extensive graduate student teaching experiences prior to the Seminar: 87 percent had taught three or more semesters and 43 percent seven or more. When asked what kind of faculty position they hoped to achieve, most (66 percent) sought to integrate teaching and research about equally, while fewer wanted either a teaching-oriented (26 percent) or research-focused (9 percent) job.

### Impact of the Seminar

Research conducted by national PFF program administrators indicate that the benefits of faculty preparation programs are many, including:

- A heightened ability to compete on the job market and improve their knowledge about the job search
- A better understanding of faculty roles
- Enhanced awareness of diverse institutions
- Increased interest in an academic career
- Development of ideas about teaching

**Table Two: Key Topics and Activities in the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching**

Timing	Topics	Sample Activities
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seminar overview</li> <li>• Carnegie Classification System</li> <li>• Characteristics of institutional types</li> <li>• Demographic data on today's college students</li> <li>• The teaching portfolio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-minute paper on the type of institution where participants would like to find their first faculty job</li> <li>• Luncheon with student affairs personnel about academic support services</li> </ul>
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement of teaching philosophy</li> <li>• Course planning: setting course goals, structuring content, constructing a syllabus, considering how multiculturalism affects teaching</li> <li>• Higher education information resources</li> <li>• Definition of accountability, autonomy, and academic freedom</li> <li>• Who are the stakeholders in higher education?</li> <li>• Role of the government and trustees in higher education</li> <li>• Student outcomes assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luncheon with local community college faculty</li> <li>• Electronic interview with for-profit higher education leader</li> </ul>
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching philosophies of outstanding UM faculty</li> <li>• Lessons learned at campus visits, institutional comparisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to liberal arts colleges and master's institutions</li> <li>• Discussion with award-winning faculty</li> <li>• Luncheon and performance of CRLT Players</li> </ul>
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact and promise of multicultural teaching</li> <li>• Assumptions about the effect of instructor and student identity on teaching</li> <li>• Faculty experiences: tenure-track, part-timers, women, people of color</li> <li>• Workload expectations at different types of institutions</li> <li>• Defining and debating tenure</li> <li>• Public opinion about higher education and perceived professorial priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching portfolio progress reports</li> <li>• Luncheon and viewing of videotape about women of color's faculty experiences, with a panel of faculty discussants</li> </ul>
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact and promise of information technology in higher education</li> <li>• Final reflections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination and discussion of course syllabi</li> <li>• Short writing exercise to re-address institutional type question (see Week 1)</li> <li>• Portfolio Fair</li> <li>• Seminar evaluation</li> <li>• Celebratory luncheon</li> </ul>

Despite the brevity of the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching, Seminar participants report receiving similar benefits.

Evaluation of our program has been extensive and rich, involving not only surveys and writing exercises for participants throughout the Seminar, but also a one-year follow-up email survey to measure the long-term impact of the program on their job searches and teaching as advanced graduate students. The email survey included questions about the Seminar's influence on job searches and its effect on teaching or plans to teach. There were 30 responses, a return rate of 75 percent, with a disciplinary breakdown quite close to that of Seminar participants.

### **Skills and Knowledge for the Academic Job Market**

Overwhelmingly, respondents to the one-year follow-up survey said they found the Seminar useful for their job searches. A large majority (75 percent) of those who interviewed for a position, or were currently interviewing, found that the Seminar helped them answer the questions they were asked during interviews. An even greater proportion (88 percent) indicated that the Seminar helped them formulate the questions they wanted to ask potential employers during job interviews.

Of those who applied or were currently applying for positions, most used at least one of the documents produced in the Seminar for their search: 91 percent used

the teaching philosophy statement, 80 percent the portfolio, and 55 percent the syllabus. Participants also reported other benefits of the Seminar, including providing information about the types of institutions to which they could apply, instilling confidence, and helping them prepare for a classroom demonstration.

### Understanding of Faculty Roles and Diverse Institutions

At the end of the May 2000 Seminar, all participants wrote letters describing their experiences and informing future participants of what they might learn. Notably, more than one-fourth of the participants described how they learned about the workings of higher education. For example, one graduate student's letter informed a future participant: "You will discover much about the role and place of faculty across disciplines and kinds of institutions. For me, considering the variations in experience, constraints, and autonomy in different contexts encouraged me to think carefully about where I would apply for faculty positions."

Spurred by this response, Seminar staff distributed a more formal evaluation at the end of the May 2001 Seminar. It asked participants to respond to open-ended questions about how they thought the program helped prepare them for the job market and their first faculty jobs, if it would change the way they teach, and their general experiences and perceptions of the Seminar.

Almost half of the respondents (16 of 34) volunteered that they gained more awareness of differences across institutions. For example, one wrote, "I've gained more familiarity with the world outside the research-intensive university I've called home. It's a wide world, and I like it!"

Additionally, 11 respondents noted that they developed a better picture of the workings of higher education, including a fuller understanding of issues such as tenure, accountability, and access. Several others reported that they felt more prepared to meet the challenges facing new faculty. To illustrate, one commented, "I now know better what it takes to survive and how to grow as a new faculty member."

### Increased Interest in an Academic Career

Before each Seminar, participants wrote a brief paper on the type of institution where they wanted to find a faculty job. At the end of the Seminar they addressed the topic again and indicated how the Seminar affected their plans.

In both years most respondents indicated that the Seminar strengthened or confirmed their academic career plans. While 14 reported that they had changed their plans, the change was only related to the type or size of postsecondary institution at which they sought

employment. For example, one participant wrote, "The biggest change for me has been an increased awareness of tenure issues. Before I might have tried to take a non-tenure-track position. . . . I'm now going to try and stay away from these positions."

Only three participants reported significant shifts in preferred careers, or being unsure about a faculty position. One, who was doubtful about the prospect of a professorial job at the beginning, wrote that such a career was a bit more likely because of the Seminar. "A month ago, I expressed some doubt about the tenure-track process and whether I would, in fact, seek a full-

time faculty job. One month later, I find myself having the same questions and doubts — the difference is that I now feel like these are *informed* doubts. . . . So if I do decide to seek a faculty job, I know now that it will certainly be in a small liberal arts college." Others in this category indicated their new interest in combined administrative-teaching positions or their uncertainty about what occupation they would pursue.

In the one-year follow-up survey, nearly all reported a confirming experience similar to this participant: "I think that the Seminar was a major turning point for me, as it helped me clarify what types of faculty jobs I am interested in pursuing." Only one respondent decided not to go into academia, albeit only for the short-term, writing, "I've decided against pursuing a faculty career in the near future. . . . I'm sure it's saved me several years of heartache and indecision. That in itself is worth more than I can say, and I know when I'm ready to take that step, I'll know what to do and what to expect."



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## Development of Ideas About Teaching

The 2001 end-of-Seminar evaluation asked participants to respond to the question "In what ways do you think participation in the Seminar will lead you to change the way you teach or plan to teach?" Most reported that the experience promoted reflection on course planning goals. "I feel that I am much better prepared to teach, because I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses," wrote one participant. Almost half reported gaining a greater awareness of resources and strategies to improve teaching, including one participant who was encouraged to try "small group work" and another who learned concrete ways to "make my classes more interactive and involve more students."

An equal number found that they learned much about creating an inclusive classroom, including one graduate student who concluded, "Speaking with students from other disciplines has really led me to re-evaluate the way I handle diversity in the classroom. In the past, I've dismissed it as a nonissue."

Significantly, in nationwide PFF surveys, developing students' abilities to deal with diverse students has ranked near the bottom of the list of benefits identified by participants in future faculty preparation programs. It is noteworthy that this was not the case in the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching. The development of inclusive pedagogical skills and awareness was a frequently mentioned outcome by participants.

### Lessons: Focused Time and Just-in-Time

The Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching provides a model by which institutions can effectively prepare graduate students for their future faculty positions, yet minimize the potential interruptions to students' doctoral progress. What are the components of the program that enable both of these goals to be met? The key lies in the strategic approach the Seminar takes to future faculty preparation.

First, the Seminar focuses its approach by emphasizing three central themes: the academic job search, the higher education system, and teaching. These strands

were carefully chosen by a steering committee of consultants from nearby institutions and University of Michigan faculty, graduate students, and administrators, who identified the knowledge and skills that they felt would be most useful in preparing participants for their future faculty roles. Significantly, the themes also were selected by graduate students themselves, who responded to the initial email survey about what they would like to learn. By focusing intensely and reflectively on a limited number of key themes, the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching can limit the program time to a manageable 30 hours. Related to the duration is the timing of the Seminar: Because it is offered in the summer, the program does not interfere with graduate students' major academic commitments.

Second, the Seminar is not only limited in time, but, like the popular business models, it also adheres to a just-in-time approach: Organizers specifically select advanced graduate students who have some college or university teaching experience. In the 2000–2001 Seminars, nearly one-fifth had or were currently looking for a faculty position, while most planned to apply within the year. A look at the PFF website indicates that this selectivity is not the case for many programs, which are open to graduate students at all levels.

However, by targeting the program to graduate students for whom the academic job search is imminent, the Seminar is able to elicit a level of intensity and a sense of relevance that may not be possible with participants who are not as advanced in their doctoral programs.

The rich one-year feedback from the Rackham-CRLT Seminar on College Teaching points to the need for a more extended follow-up of participants' use and perceptions of the program. However, the initial feedback indicates that by taking a strategic approach, a PFF program can effectively enhance both future faculty preparation and the more immediate graduate school experience.



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