

## The Ideal of Teacher Training within the Reality of the Ph.D. Program

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WE HAVE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL in the preceding papers about the training in teaching that American Classics programs provide for their graduate students. As Robert Cape showed, most or all Ph.D. programs provide training for students who will serve as teaching assistants, and at least six schools now have teaching courses like the one Miriam Pittenger described. In this paper, I do not have time to deal with all of the various possibilities for teacher training, so I will concentrate on one, namely, teacher-training courses.

A good deal is known about such courses, their advantages and shortcomings, in part because they are common outside of Classics. At Chapel Hill, for example, the Sociology department has been offering a course on teaching since the 1960s, and nationally there are so many teacher-training courses that there is now a considerable literature on them, assessing their strengths and weaknesses (Marincovich, citing earlier bibliography). While I am no expert in these matters, I have talked about graduate training with other Chairs of Ph.D. programs, and corresponded with them about it, and in this paper I will try to give you some thoughts, from the point of view of the department Chair at a Ph.D.-granting institution, about the stresses that implementing a teaching course may create. In the last part of the paper, I will move somewhat beyond that and consider teaching courses within a broader context.

### THE SCOPE OF OUR SUBJECT

The 1993 survey by the National Research Council identified 29 Classics programs in the United States that grant Ph.D.'s.<sup>1</sup> I have found about a dozen

<sup>1</sup> Goldberger. The NRC counted only those programs "that produced at least three Ph.D.'s between 1988 and 1990 and one Ph.D. in 1991 or that had a rating of 2.0 or better in that field in the 1982 study."

more, the additional programs all being small ones that the NRC consciously excluded from its list. There are, in addition, about half a dozen Ph.D. programs in Canada, so that altogether we have just under fifty programs in the U.S. and Canada. Of these, about twenty are very small, and size of program is a factor in whether a school can offer a teacher-training course. As one Chair wrote, "We have only three or four graduate students at a time, and it is more efficient to work with them individually than to offer a course on teaching." So we have about thirty programs that are large enough to offer a teacher-training course on a regular basis. Of the thirty, at least six already offer such a course: Berkeley, Boston University, Illinois, Michigan, UCLA, and Virginia. So it is some two dozen schools, not a very large number, that are candidates for the development of such a course.

#### IS A TEACHER-TRAINING COURSE BETTER THAN WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING?

At least two-thirds of the Ph.D. programs already provide some form of teacher training for Latin T.A.'s, as Bob Cape found, so the question is whether a formal course would be better than what is being done now. There are real reasons why we might prefer to continue with our present practice, which is often a kind of *ad hoc* training system. Consider, for example, the timing of a teacher-training course. Is it best offered before a graduate student begins teaching? At that point the problems do not seem real to the student. Or should the course be offered while a student is doing her first teaching? But then she walks into the classroom virtually unprepared, and the same holds true if the teaching course comes after the student's first actual teaching. Some schools have solved this by having the teaching course begin about a week before classes start, but one could argue that not having a teaching course at all makes the best sense. When a student is about to teach Latin 1, you meet with him just before the semester begins and then frequently during the course of the semester, dealing with problems and techniques as they become relevant. The next year, perhaps the student is teaching a discussion section in Greek Civilization. Once again, you meet with him before and during the course, and the discussion of content, techniques of presentation, and student learning takes place in what can be called a "just-in-time" fashion, with the graduate T.A. learning about a given problem, and how to deal with it, at precisely the moment when it becomes relevant. I do not think that a formal course can be made this flexible, and this is a real advantage of the *ad hoc* system that is now used at many schools.

#### IF WE OFFER A TEACHER-TRAINING COURSE, WHO WILL DESIGN AND TEACH IT?

Among the Chairs and faculty I know, very few feel qualified to teach about teaching.<sup>2</sup> I certainly do not feel qualified. I do not read systematically in the literature on teaching, though I do talk about my courses with colleagues. Typically, we college and university teachers do not do much conscious thinking about teaching as a subject (Weimer 9–10), and as a result we are diffident about our ability to teach teaching. This, though, should not be a serious problem. A lot of help is available, and it can be accessed quickly. Most campuses have centers for teaching and learning, and while the staff members of such a center may not know Latin or Greek, they can ask useful questions about your assumptions and why you do things a certain way. There is also a vast literature on teaching, including handbooks designed specifically for graduate students. Some of the handbooks are clear, well designed, and helpful. So our lack of confidence should not be a deterrent: there is help, there are plenty of examples to learn from, and after all we faculty do know *something* about teaching.

#### WILL THE COURSE CONTINUE TO EXIST?

I find in the literature that teacher-training courses fairly often cease to exist when the faculty member originally identified with the course stops teaching it (Marincovich 155). This is most likely to happen when there is only one person in a department who is committed to the course, and my fellow Chairs tell me that few Ph.D. departments have more than one such person. One solution is to have advanced graduate students teach the teaching course. But that instructor will need supervision, and in general, unless a department has a number of faculty members who are interested in the course, it is likely to disappear once its originator retires. A prudent Chair is therefore likely to avoid beginning such a program or devoting resources to it, and this is likely to be a continuing deterrent to teaching courses.

<sup>2</sup> It would be possible to have teaching courses taught not by faculty in the discipline, of course, but rather by faculty from the School of Education, or (better) the campus center for teaching and learning. In general, however, graduate students seem to respond best to faculty drawn from their own discipline. See on this Marincovich 153–54. In Classics in particular a knowledge of the subject area is almost a necessity if such a course is to be effective and if graduate students are to respect it.

### WILL STUDENTS REGISTER FOR AND TAKE THE COURSE?

Various factors come into play. Will the students be tested on their knowledge of teaching? If not, they may find it more useful to work on the Greek and Latin reading lists. Moreover, students know full well that when they look for a job they are going to be asked what they have published, so they may well prefer to write an article rather than take a course on teaching. Whatever the reasons, there is clear evidence of difficulty in getting students to take teacher-training courses, though the evidence comes not from Classics, but from other fields. At one school, for example, students were offered honoraria if they took the course (Marincovich 154). At Chapel Hill and elsewhere, there is a move to develop a Certificate program, certifying a certain level of expertise in teaching and learning. Among other things, the Certificate is a way of signaling to students that such training is useful, and the hope is that hiring schools will begin to ask for such credentials. Ultimately, of course, the difficulty in attracting students to courses on teaching is a sign of a professional ambivalence about teaching. Is it really worth spending time on?

### HOW DO WE FIT A TEACHER-TRAINING COURSE INTO A PH.D. PROGRAM?

Most of us who are willing to design and offer teacher-training courses think of them as something to be added to our current list of requirements. We would not be willing to have such a course replace a current requirement, would we? Will a student who studies teaching be allowed to take less Greek, or Latin, or Roman history? On the other hand, if this course is simply added to our current list of requirements, are we not increasing the burden on our students and lengthening the time to degree? This dilemma, while not insuperable, is real. Some faculty will continue to oppose making teaching the equivalent of training in the languages or research, and every school interested in teacher training will need to resolve this conflict for itself.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This issue was explored by Sheila Murnaghan, of the University of Pennsylvania, in her talk in a Presidential Forum at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the APA. The topic of the Forum was "Graduate Education in a Changing Profession." In her paper, Murnaghan noted what she called a paradox. We Classicists, she pointed out, are quite happy to acknowledge the need for changes in graduate education in order to accommodate new developments, whether they be in theory or teaching, but we are much less inclined to allow such changes to affect in any way what we are already doing. Teacher-training courses in particular raise this issue, for few of us regard the art of teaching as a scholarly subject, worthy of research, and we are reluctant to have it replace any of our traditional scholarly pursuits.

### THE PARTICULAR STRESSES OF A MINOR IN PEDAGOGY

If we move from a teacher-training course to a Minor, as Ken Kitchell will suggest, some of these stresses become even more acute. I myself am sympathetic to such a Minor, at least in theory, but from a Chair's point of view there is a very real problem, and that is the matter of focus. By definition, we are Ph.D.-producing programs. Producing Ph.D.'s is our job. It used to be that secondary school teachers were trained in teacher's colleges. That is no longer the case, and our profession should certainly be thinking about where such teachers ought to be trained now. But the question is this: do we, as a profession, want our Ph.D. programs to take on this task? Are we convinced that that is the best use of our profession's resources?

### HOW SHOULD WE PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR TEACHING IN THE FUTURE?

So far, I have been considering teacher-training courses and programs from the point of view of a Department Chair, and I have tried to outline some of the practical problems that may accompany the establishment of such courses. I would like now to consider our topic from a broader point of view, and that is the changing nature of higher education.

No one will be surprised if I claim that we are in a time of rapid and unpredictable change. The very concept of higher education is evolving. Quite apart from such recent developments as corporate and for-profit universities, there have been rapid and unpredictable changes wrought by computers and instructional technology. Many of us use Web sites, or listservs, or digital images—all of them developments of the last fifteen years or so—but so far we have mostly used them in ways that complement or supplement our traditional classroom teaching, not in ways that lead to a fundamentally different concept of education. Profoundly different concepts are on their way, though, both prompted by and exploiting emerging technologies, and there has been some thoughtful writing about them.

At least one of these concepts is important in this discussion, and that is the shift in emphasis from teaching to learning, and to active learning in particular (Bork). The new course at Illinois, described above by Miriam Pittenger, will introduce graduate students to the concept of active learning, and thus reflects this idea. But there are also radically different models of education out there, and if realized they will have profound effects on what the graduate students we are now training will be doing in twenty or thirty years. Perhaps the most compelling of these models suggests that instructional technology can be used to simulate the conversation between an instructor

and a student. The advantage is that the conversation can take place at any time and any place, and, more importantly, that it is suitable for the particular student, thus improving the learning process (Bork, Duderstadt 60–61). Any such computer-delivered course would take very careful thought and design, involving a team of, say, three persons in Classics and three in software design. And that is a very different model of teaching than the one we currently think of.

Now what can we include in our teacher-training course that will prepare our students for these changes? Obviously, we cannot predict what techniques our current graduate students will need twenty years from now, or what resources will be available to them. Thus our teacher-training course must teach the techniques they need right now. But it must also move beyond that. It must introduce our students to teaching and learning as a subject worth thinking about, and even reading and writing about. The teacher-training course must, that is, be designed as the first step in a life-long process, namely the professional development of our graduate students. Just as we hope our students will continue to develop as scholars and as students of the ancient world throughout their professional lives, so we should hope that they will continue to develop and grow as teachers, and that they will take from our teaching course a love of the subject of learning and teaching. We do not need to create a course that will give them every technique they will need. We do need to create one that will get them started on the difficult task of figuring out how students learn. And this in turn means, of course, that we ourselves must be ready to ask and try to answer that same question: not “How should I teach this?” but “How will students best learn it?”

Whether we are ready as a profession to do this—whether we want to take teaching seriously as a scholarly subject—I do not know. There are, however, some specific steps we can take. First, we can establish ongoing mechanisms for talking about and informing ourselves on new developments. We need a forum for the honest appraisal of teaching courses, and more generally for the exchange of information on teaching and new research on teaching and learning. Perhaps the APA can provide space on its web site for such a forum. Perhaps the University of Pennsylvania, which undertook just such an initiative seven years ago, is willing to resume it. The APA’s Committee on Education can work to involve increasing numbers of Classicists in the current debate on higher education. And along with our graduate students, the faculty of tomorrow, we—the faculty of today—can all take a lively interest in our own continuing professional development and understanding of the process of learning. The debate about learning, and the rôle that universities will have in the learning process, is well under way. We Classicists need to be part of that debate, and so do our students.

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