Perspectives of Teaching from a LGU’s College of Agriculture & Life Sciences

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What is the GTS?

Graduate Teaching Scholars (GTS) in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to train science PhDs in pedagogical instruction.
GTS Components

- Annual student cohorts (6 students ea)
- Weekly Classes
- 3 Year Progressive Teaching Plan
- Future Professoriate Certificate
- Educational Research Component
- Mentor
GTS Scholars Summary

- 30 Scholars have participated in the program
- Scholars represent all departments in CALS (12)
Evaluation Need

- Program completed five (5) years. Est. 2012
- Scholars were graduating
- Program Improvement
Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative evaluation is to explore the characteristics and recognition of the program components that are supporting teaching improvements in GTS Scholars and Virginia Tech CALS more broadly.
Evaluation Questions

• Determine what aspects of GTS are having an impact on Scholars.
• Identify impacts that the GTS program has had on Scholars teaching.
• Identify attitudes and perceptions held by Virginia Tech’s CALS faculty and Department Heads.
Theoretical Framework

• Experiential Learning
  - learning from doing
• Situated Learning Theory
  - direct embodied experience
• Communities of Practice
  - vicarious experience, through relationships, around shared desire for skill development
Methods and Data Analysis

• Design
  • Qualitative
  • Triangulation (Department Heads, Mentors, Participants)
  • Focus Groups & Interviews

• Analysis
  • Audit Trail
  • Open Codes
  • Multiple coding
Participants: Employees (n=8)

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<td>David</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
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<td>Max</td>
<td>Mentor &amp; Department Head</td>
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## Participants: Scholars (n=10)

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<td>Samantha</td>
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<td>Molly</td>
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<td>Grant</td>
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<td>Pam</td>
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Themes Developed

- Recruitment & Finding Successful Scholars
- Three year program is beneficial
- Weekly session
- Experience of Teaching
- Mentors
- Development of Community of Practice
- Preparation for a Career in Academia
- Perspectives on teaching
Faculty and Administrators’ Perspectives of the Role and Importance of Teaching

• Teaching Has Not Been Historically Valued
• Good Teaching is a Fundamental Mission
• Faculty Felt Ill Prepared for Teaching Responsibilities
• Acknowledgement that Bad Teaching is a Detriment
• Experience of Teaching Will Differentiate PhD Graduates
• Teaching will be important for the University to set it apart from peer Institutions
Teaching Has Not Been Historically Valued

“I think in higher ed for years we have just kinda like, oh yeah yeah yeah everybody just figures it out, it’s like, eh, yeah, well, you can only figure out so much on your own.”

Karen, a mentor

“paper is the currency so they kinda spend all of their time in research, so even among the students, some have these vague feeling about teaching, that maybe teaching is not that good of a way to invest your time”

Pam, a Scholar
Good Teaching is a Fundamental Mission

“I have always valued, and I think all departments has to, value teaching. Teaching is important”

Max, Department Head

“they have only been trained in research, and there is a whole range of appointments, percentages. There is a whole other dimension that we need to be training students in”

Shannon, Department Head
Faculty Felt Ill Prepared for Teaching Responsibilities

“I helped with teaching some but I had never really received mentoring, it was really the experience that I would gather [in the classroom]..., certainly no, I didn’t even know what the word pedagogy meant.”

Max

“I am struck by the fact that nobody ever engaged me and taught me things in that way, yeah, I was pretty much just left to my own devices”

Charlotte
Acknowledgement that Bad Teaching is a Detriment

“given my age, I’m more from the kinda lecture format which is pretty stale and boring, for the current generation, probably any generation (laughter)”

David
Experience of Teaching Will Differentiate PhD Graduates

• “I still think that the majority of the students who go through Science field, like ours, come out with little in the way of formal training and education in Pedagogy, and so that certainly could set these students apart if their science skills and accomplishments are good, I think if someone is interested in an academic career I think that this really could be a differentiating factor for them.”

   Tim
Teaching Is Important For The University To Set It Apart From Peer Institutions

“teaching is becoming more and more important. I mean, it’s always been important, ok, but it is being perceived as more and more important by administrators and ya know we went through this period where it was all research, research, research but now, given the competition for students,, the teaching mission is becoming more and more valued by administrators.”

Daniel

“in my mind, ya know, the teachers are bringing in more money than anybody, because their the ones the students are paying, they are taking their classes, and they are paying tuition dollars for”

Max, Dep’t Head
Limitations

- Emergent Theme
- Specific questions were not asked about teaching
- Non-teaching faculty were not included in the population
Implications

• More teaching preparation is required of PhD students, because...

• In a competitive academic job-market a demonstrated ability to teach is marketable

• Indication that research institutions are turning towards improving undergrad teaching as a marketing tool.
Recommendations

• Preparation needs to be more than just being a TA.
• A named-program to help students market themselves
• Long-term involvement, not just one-time seminar or class.
Questions?
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