

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Commentary

November 11, 2013

We Must Prepare Ph.D. Students for the Complicated Art of Teaching

By Derek Bok

Graduate study for the Ph.D. in the United States presents a curious paradox. Our universities have developed thousands of distinguished scientists and scholars. More than half the winners of Nobel Prizes in the sciences and economics from 1997 to 2007 did their graduate work in this country, continuing a pattern that has persisted since the end of World War II. Students all over the world come here for graduate training, and universities in many other nations have expanded and reformed their doctoral programs to resemble our method more closely.

At the same time, graduate schools can justly be condemned as the worst-designed and worst-administered of any major academic program in our research universities. There are far too many Ph.D. programs, many of them of mediocre quality. Dropout rates are embarrassingly high. More than 40 percent of graduate students fail to earn doctorates within 10 years, a number far greater than in other advanced degree programs. Students take too long to finish, with almost 30 percent in the social sciences and 40 percent in the humanities lingering for more than seven years before earning their degrees.

The most glaring defect of our graduate programs, however, is how little they do to prepare their students to teach. Doctoral candidates have long had the chance to assist professors in large lecture courses by leading weekly discussions among small groups of undergraduates. Yet only a minority of those assistants report that they receive adequate supervision by the faculty member in

charge of the course. In fact, professors often tell their graduate students not to spend much time on their teaching duties, lest it distract them from the all-important task of writing a thesis.

Some improvement has occurred in recent years with the spread of centers to help graduate students learn to be teaching assistants. Still, participation in those centers is typically voluntary and rarely offers graduate students more than an orientation program, an occasional workshop on a specific topic, and perhaps a chance to have their teaching videotaped and critiqued by a member of the center staff. Although such assistance is helpful, it is far from adequate to prepare aspiring professors for the challenges they are likely to face once they embark upon an academic career.

There are reasons that departments have been unwilling to do more. Most professors are not convinced that teaching is a skill that requires formal preparation. Rather, they are inclined to regard it as an art that one acquires naturally and improves through practice over time. After all, that is how they learned to teach. Besides, with Ph.D. candidates already taking so long to complete the programs, why add new requirements to existing programs?

These reasons have never been convincing, but they have gradually become increasingly untenable. Over the past two or three decades, research about learning has yielded useful insights about teaching that graduate students need to know. Much has now been discovered about cognition, motivation, and the relative effectiveness of different methods of instruction.

New research about the behavior of students has also revealed compelling reasons to make full use of this knowledge. Among the recent discoveries, investigators have found that college students are not making as much progress as most people have assumed in mastering essential skills such as writing and critical thinking.

Other findings suggest that undergraduates are less engaged by their courses, and that they are spending much less time studying than they did 40 years ago. Those problems will not be solved by simply continuing to teach in the same way as in the past. Professors will need to make use of the growing body of knowledge about teaching and learning in order to succeed.

Meanwhile, more than six million undergraduates are taking at least one course per year online. Carnegie Mellon University has developed computer-assisted courses in several subjects that allow students to master the subject matter in much less time than in regular classes. The emergence of massive open online courses (MOOCs), enrolling huge numbers of students, is causing many prominent professors to take an interest in teaching online. Graduate students clearly need training in the uses and misuses of technology to be adequately prepared for the classrooms of tomorrow.

Technology changes the nature of teaching in several ways. Developing an online course is a collaborative venture in which instructors work with technicians and media experts. Teaching, then, becomes less intuitive and more of a collective, deliberative activity. In addition, technology can produce a record, not just of what instructors say, but of how students respond to questions and homework problems. As a result, professors can discover what material gives students difficulty and try to adjust their teaching accordingly. Once again, however, professors will have to know more than they have in the past to make the most of these intriguing developments.

In short, pedagogy has become a much more complicated process that has evolved from an art that one can acquire by oneself to a subject requiring formal preparation.

The need for such training is all the more urgent because of the conditions that many graduate students will encounter in their

professional careers. Only one-quarter of the recent Ph.D.'s seeking academic careers are finding jobs in research universities. Most of the others obtain positions in institutions with students who tend to be less motivated and less prepared for college than the undergraduates their teachers knew, and teaching them successfully will be a greater challenge.

Many students today are also multitasking, looking at their email during class and listening to music or texting friends while they study. Undergraduates are using much of the time previously spent on homework communicating via social media, surfing the web, and playing computer games. Therefore, whether they know it or not, professors everywhere are now competing with Twitter, smartphones, computer games, and much else for the time and attention of their students. In this environment, doctoral candidates planning on an academic career will need to know more to figure out how to engage their students in the learning process.

Graduate students are unlikely to receive the preparation they need if academic departments continue to have almost complete control over Ph.D. programs. The problem is not just that faculties resist change. Professors in departments of English literature or economics or chemistry are simply not trained to offer instruction on the applications of cognitive psychology and motivation theory, or the findings of researchers concerning the relative effectiveness of different methods of instruction, or the skills required for developing online courses. If such material is ever to become a part of preparing graduate students, then provosts and deans will have to take the initiative, not only to persuade the faculty that change is needed but also to recruit instructors from across the university who are capable of teaching graduate students what they need to know.

It is not entirely obvious just when and where the necessary instruction should take place. One's instinctive response is to

make room within the graduate program itself. The problem with this approach, however, is that one-third to one-half of all new Ph.D.'s do not pursue academic careers but find jobs in industry, government, or some other field of employment. So it is hardly fair to force all graduate students to take instruction in pedagogy. Graduate schools could and should require prospective teaching assistants to receive enough training to carry out their assignments effectively. But any further preparation for teaching will have to be offered on a voluntary basis.

Some graduate students may not choose to acquire all the training they need, while other successful candidates for faculty positions will have received their doctorates from universities that offer little preparation for teaching. As a result, institutions wishing to equip their new recruits properly for duties in the classroom and as members of the academic profession will not succeed by merely offering a day or two of orientation.

Instead, to prepare their professors properly, colleges may need to give them a course that includes material dealing not only with pedagogy but also with ethical problems in teaching and research, the history of higher education, the principal schools of thought on the undergraduate curriculum, and the organization, financing, and governance of universities. If beginning instructors are thought to have too much else to do, they could be given a reduced teaching load for their first year. Any short-term costs should be more than compensated for by the improved preparation given to new recruits to fulfill their responsibilities as teachers and faculty members.

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of instituting these reforms. One of the legitimate complaints against colleges and universities is that they have been exceedingly slow to change their methods of education. Lecturing is still the most common way to teach, even though it has long been shown to be ill-suited to the task of developing the capacity for critical thinking, a

competence that almost all professors regard as the most important goal of undergraduate education. Feedback to students continues to be skimpy and late in coming despite its importance to learning. The basic division of the college curriculum into majors, electives, and general education has likewise remained pretty much the same over many decades despite its many weaknesses and unsubstantiated rationales.

Critics often say that the reason instructional methods change so slowly is that professors do not care about teaching and prefer to spend their time on research. This explanation is hardly convincing. International surveys regularly find that professors in America care more about teaching and education than do their counterparts in virtually any other country in the world. Even in research universities, faculty members spend much more time on teaching than on research when classes are in session. Studies also have found that prolific researchers are no less successful or conscientious in the classroom than are their colleagues who rarely publish.

A more plausible reason for the sluggish pace of reform is the scanty preparation given to graduate students for their role as educators. Lacking such training, newly minted Ph.D.'s naturally begin their teaching by trying to emulate the professors they respected most during their student days. While there is something to be said for this practice, it hardly encourages innovation in the classroom. Rather, it tends to produce an uncritical, conservative attitude toward teaching, quite at variance with the way most faculty members go about their research.

Continuing this approach is likely to prove even more costly in the future than it has been in the past. President Obama has called for a significant increase in the number of Americans graduating from college by enrolling hundreds of thousands of new students every year. Many of these young people will be less prepared for college work than the average student today and, hence, more difficult to

teach.

Even if colleges manage to meet the president's goal (and that will be a tall order indeed), America will never regain the huge lead in educational attainment that helped to make it the world's most prosperous nation from 1870 to 1970. Now that a dozen or more countries have made the transition from an elite to a mass or nearly universal system of higher education, it will be all that we can do simply to keep up.

If the United States is ever to regain a significant economic advantage from the education of its people, it will have to come through the *quality* of instruction that our undergraduates receive and not just from the *quantity* of college degrees being offered. Such instruction will surely be slow to arrive without a faculty trained to bring to its teaching the same ample store of background knowledge, the same respect for relevant data, and the same questioning, innovative spirit that professors have long displayed in carrying out their research.

Derek Bok is a former president of Harvard University, where he is now a research professor. His most recent book is Higher Education in America (Princeton University Press, 2013).

60 comments



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patbowne · 5 days ago

While I agree that teaching deserves more respect in graduate schools, what is the point of preparing graduate students for it if we at the same time allow it to become a predominantly part-time profession? How many full-time teaching jobs will still exist by the time the students you're training have graduated?

We're supposed to be intelligent and highly educated professionals! Are we going to sit around blithely discussing how we ought to train people for a job that is melting away under our feet? Are we satisfied to be the last generation of full-time tenure-track faculty in US higher education? Perhaps we can do something -- like, for instance, gather data on how the switch to part-time workers has immiserated our faculty and impacted the education our

institutions claim to offer, and make sure every college's accrediting agency receives third-party comments detailing these issues.

If we aren't willing to defend the existence of our profession, adequately preparing graduate students to enter it will be worse than counterproductive. It will just create a larger class of people competing against each other for part-time jobs, maintaining the 'buyers' market' that educational institutions currently exploit.

60 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ben Quick → patbowne · 4 days ago

"Are we satisfied to be the last generation of full-time tenure-track faculty in US higher education?"

Bravo!

This is the question. Unfortunately the answer seems to be yes. The notion that tenured and tenure-track faculty have a responsibility to ensure the same opportunities they enjoy as a result of the collective courage of past generations of scholars seems to have disappeared. If those with relative job security and contracts allowing time and funding for research and travel do not feel the responsibility to pass these tenets of higher education to this generation, to, as you put it eloquently, "defend the existence of our profession," we are doomed.

17 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



patbowne → Ben Quick · 4 days ago

Thanks for the kind words!

I don't think we can reach a conclusion about faculty's position on this yet. Just because people aren't addressing the problem doesn't mean they don't take it seriously. They simply may have no idea what to do. It feels awful to be concerned about a looming problem, but have no idea what to do about it; that's why I made a concrete suggestion.

I don't know whether my idea is a good one, but I can attest to the influence of accreditation bodies. In my own field, one accreditor who decided to apply an unexpectedly stringent standard caused an amazing amount of uproar. Although the standard was eventually not applied it led my professional organization to offer a continuing series of graduate courses, just in case something like this should happen again.

So I am quite serious in suggesting that full-time faculty prepare third-party statements about the effect of the switch to adjunct labor and appeal to the accreditation system. We are in the position to gather the relevant data, and really should be keeping track of it anyway as part of ongoing program assessment.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



99Luftballons · 5 days ago

The article strangely states:

"Dropout rates are embarrassingly high."

The embarrassing part is that at least 75% aren't given the boot in the first 2 years.

But that is directly related to:

"There are far too many Ph.D. programs, many of them of mediocre quality."

Which is directly related to the financial incentives to admit, retain and graduate which all seem to get increasing pressure. Along with traditional empire building.

Probably 2% or less of bachelor degree holders should get a PhD. The PhD should be an original research degree. "The B.A.-Ph.D. Nexus" with William G. Bowen as a co-author provides a historical basis for thinking even 2% is way too high given the increase in B.A. degrees and the decline in quality since in 1974 the PhD Proclivity had dropped to 1.7%. The authors determined that the elimination of Vietnam War draft deferments was a key driver in PhD proclivity's rise and fall.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/19...>

The article should be calling for funding to be slashed to correct the problem of too many grad students.

8 ^ | 2 v · Reply · Share ›



archman → 99Luftballons · 3 days ago

Bingo. Much of our "problems" with today's graduate students would evaporate overnight if we still held to the same selections criteria we did 20 years ago.

In 21st century American Higher Education, virtually anyone with a bachelor's degree can be admitted into a graduate program. Many Master's degree programs have denigrated into the 20th century equivalent of Bachelor's degrees.

What I am getting from this article is a copy/paste job that we have been getting for years for *undergraduate degrees*. That is, requiring faculty to increasingly seek out strategies to help our students succeed, as their performance continuously declines year after year since the 1990's.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



99Luftballons → archman · 3 days ago

archman, [initial part deleted because I was confused over which thread and article I was dealing with. So it was completely wrong.]

I would agree that many of the "problems" would disappear, but I would also suggest **there is absolutely no shame in dropping out of a grad program** if you don't like it or it isn't right for you. Grad school should be about original research that is of value to the field. Original research should be very different from undergrad work.

Apparently, studies have found that GRE and undergrad GPA are relatively poor predictors of research productivity. There is nothing wrong with a dropout rate of 40% even with top students, because grad school should be very different and they might find they don't like it, or they aren't good at it, or they would prefer a job in the outside world.

[delete because relating to the wrong article]

[quote because relating to the wrong article]

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



archman → 99Luftballons · 2 days ago

Sure. Now find a graduate program that will endorse these sentiments publicly. Hell, find an undergraduate program that will do this.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



99Luftballons → archman · 2 days ago

archman, at one time, at least some STEM undergrad programs expected and got lots of transfers to easier programs. We were warned in high school that university was much harder.

"Look to your left, look to your right, because one of you won't be here by the end of the year"

- *The Paper Chase*

Some undergrad classes got this level of weeding by Christmas, even with some use of belling the marks.

But none actually quoted Professor Kingsfield or stated anything similar. But there were usually fewer financial and political repercussions because most students just switched to easier courses and programs so the university still kept the money. But there were those who did dropout.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



navydad · 5 days ago

I would suggest some training in testing and measurement, especially for STEM faculty, many of whom seem to think that failing lots of students and giving out almost no As is a sign of rigor.

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



johnadamdrew · 5 days ago

The best point made here is that teaching habits of mind should match those of research -- if innovation and care look the same in the classroom as in research, then both spheres benefit.

13 ^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›



baisasa · 5 days ago

Agreed that professors should have some form of training before they are let loose in a classroom, agreed with previous poster that STEM professors need this more than others (this needs to come from the Dean, that failure to matriculate students is a failure of the professor) but not for this reason " professors everywhere are now competing with Twitter, smartphones, computer games, and much else for the time and attention of their students". Students need to learn to pay attention to what they are paying for - their instructor.

9 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Nani → baisasa · 4 days ago

I suggest that (some) faculty learn to meaningfully engage students so they DO pay attention!

2 ^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›

2 / 11 | < | > | Reply · Share ›



Momcat49 · 5 days ago

Hallelujah! So glad that teaching as a professorial skill has at last been recognized as at least as important as research. When my husband started in his position at the university, he was astounded that no faculty ever came into any of his lectures to evaluate his teaching abilities! Now, students return to take course after course from him--& not because he grades easily (just the opposite). He had the recent experience of subbing for another prof & one student brought his dad to the next class to hear my husband, who feels that his mission, first & foremost IS to TEACH. He also makes certain that his grad students get adequate practice in the classroom, as well as in the library.

13 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



dnewton137 · 5 days ago

Amen! Several of the worst teachers I've ever had were Nobel Laureates.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



profdrsoandso · 4 days ago

I find the crocodile tears from a Harvard president, however well-intentioned, to be borderline insulting. An obvious reason for the neglect of teaching in PhD studies is that the faculty themselves (especially at the best programs, which if the advice of other posters is to be followed, are the only ones that should exist) are encouraged to consider teaching to be a dangerous distraction from their "real" work, if not an outright waste of time. Has Harvard ever trumpeted the hiring, let alone the retention, of a faculty member based on his/her teaching skills? More likely, there is a long list of successful teachers among the junior faculty who were kicked to the curb for wasting their time on such secondary pursuits. Creating a few courses, or even staffing a "teaching center" with a couple of recent PhDs (who may or may not be considered "real" faculty by institutions that barely care about teaching) are nice gestures, but ultimately empty. If institutions care about teaching and advising, they can show it in how they socialize, evaluate, and promote their faculty, as well as how they train their students.

51 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Middlemarch → profdrsoandso · 4 days ago

This is typical resentment-filled academic rubbish: I was a grad student at Harvard when Bok was president, and was very well trained as a teacher because of policies he instituted. And nearly all of the professors I studied with were excellent teachers, and taught the graduate students essential skills of the craft. Bok has been a powerful advocate of good teaching for many years. That some faculty didn't get tenure there is irrelevant to this discussion.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



profdrsoandso → Middlemarch · 4 days ago

Resentment-filled, perhaps, but rubbish is in the eye of the beholder. I am well aware of Bok's accomplishments, and I do not doubt that students can have wonderful experiences in graduate school at top programs, and work with wonderful teachers. I know I did. But I stand by my concern that there are systemic problems in academe that devalue teaching and undermine teachers that need to be addressed, and which both Bok and you appear to ignore.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



LP1230 → profdrsoandso · 3 days ago

Yep. You nailed it. With the way that academic hiring and promotion is done now there is very little incentive to focus on good teaching. There's no way to get tenure by being a good teacher. I have a friend who busted his ass teaching classes as an adjunct and even managed to finish his own dissertation while doing it. He has been passed over twice for full-time positions by younger newly minted PhDs with book contracts and degrees from prestige brand schools. I listen to the way these folks talk and they are so contemptuous of their students and so annoyed that they have to spend time dealing with them. How about hiring and promoting people who actually want to teach? What a concept.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



99Luftballons · 4 days ago

A key solution is to have 90% of undergrads taught by the clever undergrads (juniors and seniors), the top Masters students, and industry adjuncts. To get them better than quite a number of tenured faculty just have them receive 3-6 weeks of full-time, intense training in how to teach the bottom 90% of undergrads at the specific institution, with coaching. Cut the bottom third at that point. Monitor their teaching and then cull the bottom third by Thanksgiving. **The ability to speak proper English with ease should be a basic requirement.**

90% of undergrads should never see or speak to a PhD or PhD candidate as undergrads.

8 ^ | 2 v · Reply · Share ›



Anna Spiro · 4 days ago

Teach public speaking; let the kids look at several MOOCs on line to determine who teaches the best ... NOT all that hard to say what makes a decent lecture. Also make students speak from notes not read texts - or teach them how to read with great expression and loud enough to be heard.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Anna Spiro · 4 days ago

I have seen the future and it is MOOCs!

1 ^ | 3 v · Reply · Share ›



headofschool23 · 4 days ago

This is an important commentary on the sad state of academe and pedagogy - but also a necessary review of what we need to examine as next steps. My view has long been that virtually all traditional education is about the teacher and the teaching - not about the learner and the learning. And that is one reason the arc of our leadership is now falling in the world. MOOCs, ironically, put more power in the hands - and fingertips - of the learner, though they force the teacher to be even more accountable and innovative (in the best cases). And online ed is only a partial answer.

With content, traditional departmentalization, and splinter-thin specialization becoming less fitting for the world we have launched, teachers who rely on threadbare lecture skills to pass along dog-eared material will not capture a bright student mind - and that's apart from texting-oriented eighteen-year-olds. Students, however, will work their tails off for and with teachers and profs who regard them highly and who engage them energetically. But it has to be in the process of solving real problems, of being absorbed in "stuff that matters," and

of digging into knowledge that will carry them forward in the world.

Ph.D. dissertation and that he had to do this kind of research for the

[see more](#)

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Matthew Boedy · 4 days ago

the comment below to "teach public speaking" includes a nod toward a broader rhetorical education - of the pedagogy of the ancient rhetors. Might we suggest this? Or find that many doing Phd in rhetoric (like me) find pedagogy often a natural built-in to our research.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



L Jordan · 4 days ago

Concomitantly, universities need to recognize that the widely used student surveys do not provide a valid basis judging teaching quality.

12 ^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›



archman → L Jordan · 3 days ago

Yes, they tend to do more harm than good.

1 ^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›



Marc Baldwin · 4 days ago

That's for sure. A lot of PhDs I know can't teach a lick. Worse, their "teaching" is often counter-productive.

1 ^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›



rayjamesedu48 · 4 days ago

As a former president of Harvard, Derek Bok could have raised and pressed these points years ago at Harvard. The assumption is that Ph.D. recipients getting college teaching posts have only a smattering of prior teaching or teacher training under their belts. In other words, they are woefully prepared to teach. And undergraduates in particular want good teachers, not good researchers, in the classroom.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



rayjamesedu48 → rayjamesedu48 · 4 days ago

By the same token, it was always tacitly understood among, say, English department grad students pursuing a Ph.D. that their universities' education departments were the worst place to learn how to be a teacher. Forty years ago most education departments were campus punchlines, and not much has changed today. They are lockstep mills for mediocre and sub-mediocre students seeking to become elementary and secondary education instructors whose ill-prepared students get passed up to college teachers expected to undo 12 years of execrable prior instruction in a 14-week semester. Miracle workers, we're not.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



David Jao → rayjamesedu48 · 2 days ago

Uh, what? Derek Bok did raise these points at Harvard years ago. He is the reason why Harvard graduate students undergo mandatory teaching apprenticeships. Harvard has a Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning because of Derek Bok. The teacher training program at Harvard is far more substantial than that of any other research-intensive school I've seen, including formal mentorship, mandatory videotape

review of class sessions, in-class evaluations by senior instructors, and required live examinations prior to the granting of teaching privileges. While not on the scale of a graduate thesis, the apprenticeship program does result in key benefits for what is relatively speaking not much effort. I know that my own teaching improved substantially as a result of the training, and I wish that my current university (or any other university, really) had anything like it for current Ph.D students. Perhaps the competition is too weak to support comparisons, but Harvard is well ahead of the curve here.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Brian Abel Ragen · 4 days ago

Let's remember what a concentration on teaching methods has done to education on K-12 level in the years since World War II. During that time the schools of education have taken complete control of the preparation of teachers. They have focused on methods rather than the mastery of a subject. They have insisted on the implementation of a series of fads and absolutely forbidden the use of methods that were known to work. Hardly anyone would claim that the result of this experiment has been better educated graduate. It would be foolish to repeat it on the college level.

It is true, however, that many Ph.D.'s do not receive enough training in teaching, but what they need is more of the only part of teacher training that most K-12 teachers recall as valuable: student teaching. The professors responsible for the work of teaching assistants should give them the chance to lecture occasionally and critique their work. They should also sit in on discussion sections and critique those. Such a focus on teaching would be practical and useful, and only the disinclination of many faculty to treat graduate students AS students instead of as peons convenient for doing scut-work prevents it from happening.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



archman → Brian Abel Ragen · 3 days ago

Yep, crash and burn of our younger generations, courtesy of the edu-works. It sure would be nice if we could train our teachers in mastering their content, rather than take a pile of courses in making students feel good about themselves, and teaching how to teach using debunked or niche theories.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jpeters2931 · 4 days ago

I agree that teaching preparation for graduate students is weak, and that it makes for weak teaching later in professors careers.

However, you don't get professorial positions based on teaching. You get them based on your publication record.

I'm an early-career scientist very interested in teaching, and with experience doing so. I gave up on finding academic teaching positions (at least for now), and partially because I convinced myself no one really cares about teaching in the academic hiring process. Can someone convince me otherwise, even for smaller colleges?

When teaching is valued by search and P&T committees it will improve. Not before.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jbranno → jpetters2931 · 4 days ago

Well, at my institution teaching is the priority. Yes, we research, publish, and present at conferences--but teaching is the primary criterion of tenure and promotion across campus. Sometimes it seems that many people at larger institutions forget that their model isn't the only model.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jpetters2931 → jbranno · 3 days ago

Glad to hear it! What about deciding on who joins the faculty? Are teaching credentials also important in deciding who gets interviewed? Or is the # of pubs and grants? Service/committee work? And in what order are these criteria considered?

I'm not saying I spent years applying for teaching positions but didn't have success when I was trying. And of course there are many possibilities why but it's all speculation from my end. Maybe they just didn't like my last name :)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jbranno → jpetters2931 · 2 days ago

Yes, teaching is paramount to the hiring process here. I am chairing a search committee right now, and our focus is on those who will excel in the classroom. Of course, they need to have credentials and scholarship, but it's imperative that teaching be something the candidate reveals as important to him/her. We require letters of recommendation to address their teaching (at least one), and we are often turned off by a focus on scholarship without attention to pedagogy in application letters. I am at a SLAC, though, with a 4/4 load... not R1 with grad students. It's a different world.

I wish candidates would do a little research on schools before they apply--it would help them tailor their applications and save a lot of time and anguish on both sides of the hiring process. Who knows how many great colleagues we might have missed out on simply because the candidate sent us a 4 page discussion of the dissertation without a single mention of teaching? (I might also recommend that a 2 page cover letter is sufficient!).

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jpetters2931 → jbranno · 13 hours ago

A SLAC is exactly what I was looking for for a position! And a 4/4 load, with maybe some summer research w/undergrads would have been perfect.

I'm happy to hear teaching IS taken seriously in some institutions (R1s notwithstanding). Sounds like your college is the sort of place I should have been applying but just didn't have the right opportunity at the right time.

As for candidates not tailoring their applications to the schools...well, there are larger problems afoot in interviews and applications, now that everything's digital, but I won't forgive someone for not putting in the work necessary to possibly pique a committee's interest!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**mentalsoup** · 4 days ago

It is not just academia but US society more broadly that fails to appreciate and reward teaching, at all levels. As someone who has taught both in the US and abroad, I found the differences in how teachers are viewed and treated here vs. elsewhere to be quite stark. This is not just a systemic problem limited to academia, it is a societal issue.

13 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Bernecky** · 4 days ago

I don't see that we must do anything for any student except the one who is in school by law.

If medicine and the law were required subjects from K-12, we would prepare our youth for higher education and free ourselves of two monopolies.

We would hire as elementary teachers those with *work* experience, including experience in medicine and the law. Death, if not retirement, would take care of the problems posed by tenure and possibly-higher salaries (though, regarding that last, a lot of senior citizens are eager to bestow their knowledge, and might do so *at cost*). Children would be the recipients of wise people's earlier investments in education. They'd be as apprentices, rather than as footballs.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**sand6432** · 4 days ago

This point has been made many times before, and nothing has changed, so I am not very optimistic that Bok's well-argued recommendation will be followed widely, if at all. My own decision to drop out of grad school after two years was based on my self-assessment as a potential teacher, rather than any actual experience in teaching. Had I been given the opportunity to teach, I might have discovered that I was better at it than I thought I would be, or at least my suspicions about my capabilities would have been confirmed. Either way, i would have had a better basis for making a life-changing decision. By the way, it can also be said that universities provide no training for those professors who get elevated into administrative positions; just as professors are left to learn teaching on the job, so are they left to learn how to be a good administrator after being appointed to the post. University culture seems to breed dysfunctionality of this sort.---Sandy Thatcher

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Bernecky** → sand6432 · 4 days ago

Bok is a con artist, a professional BS-er. His "recommendation" is neither well-argued nor a recommendation *unless it's for one like himself*. He says everything except what he needs to say: that he could be replaced by a 26-year-old.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**pneitzel** · 4 days ago

For the past 21 years the School of Mechanical Engineering at Georgia Tech has required of all doctoral students their participation in a "teaching practicum" course that is offered each semester. Each student works alongside a faculty member, assisting with a course, including the delivery of three lectures supervised by the faculty mentor, holding of office hours or problem sessions, as appropriate, suggestion of assignments and/or exam questions, and attendance at weekly 90-minute sessions at which various aspects of teaching, mentoring of students, and even life as a faculty member are

teaching, mentoring of students, and even me as a faculty member are discussed. Students also give two brief oral presentations on their experiences to their teaching-practicum peers. This is not simply serving as a TA or grader-- we provide paid undergraduate graders for such courses.

When originally proposed, there was a good deal of faculty pushback from colleagues who did not want the students they were paying from grants as research assistants to be working as TA's. The creation of our teaching practicum course allows students to sign up for it, as for any other course, serving as a placeholder for the time spent on the endeavor.

[see more](#)

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Christopher Harendza → pneitzel · 4 days ago

Bravo is right! Teaching is not valued by our research universities whatsoever. They are just as culpable in the decline of the value of degrees as other institutions. An AS is all \$hit, BS is Bull S, MS is More S, and the Ph.D. just piles it higher and deeper. When the post-doc comes we learn more and more about less and less until we know everything about nothing.

What research universities fail to understand is that teaching makes you more knowledgeable about many areas and in the end probably a better researcher. I have taught for 20 years after leaving a high powered post doc and I've learned more from teaching than I did in grad school or as a post doc. We have interviewed dozens of high powered researchers who want to try to teach and most don't have a clue as to what it takes - and most have forgotten their basics!

The system is highly flawed. It is high time the NIH force research universities to have a bona-fide teaching requirement - and not just a TA position.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



frankschmidt · 4 days ago

"Carnegie Mellon University has developed computer-assisted courses in several subjects that allow students to master the subject matter in much less time than in regular classes."

The plural of anecdote is not data.

I would love to see a refereed citation that verifies this point. All I can find on Google is that CMU has changed the lab component of Introductory Statistics. Hardly earth-shattering.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Shina · 4 days ago

I fully agree that graduate students are not prepared for teaching, but the voluntary attendance at the pedagogical workshops are not the fault of the faculty: we are not allowed to give credits for this type of workshops. It is the responsibility of university administration to require these type of classes, and they have to be credited.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ddwalker · 4 days ago

Deans should create programs of professional development for faculty that

would include pedagogy and leadership. While adding pedagogy to a graduate curriculum might be a start, pedagogical instruction will stick better when a person is engaged full-on in teaching. Organizations that are talent-based have robust professional development practices; the academy should catch up.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rose · 3 days ago

This certainly cannot be said for the University of Wisconsin - Madison. The English Department provides comprehensive teaching preparation for its doctoral students. In fact, I was amazed by how much training is required. Now if they could just get the pay issue resolved. :)

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



5768 · 3 days ago

"Therefore, whether they know it or not, professors everywhere are now competing with Twitter, smartphones, computer games, and much else for the time and attention of their students. In this environment, doctoral candidates planning on an academic career will need to know more to figure out how to engage their students in the learning process."

Figure out how to engage? How about strict attention to a no-electronic devices policy? Demand attention in class and command attention.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



archman → 5768 · 3 days ago

Yes. Multi-tasking is *not* effective for the higher-order thinking required for Higher Education curricula. This is supported by nearly all research, as well as simple common sense logic.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



hstrytool → 5768 · 3 days ago

At last! Thank you! Why do we need to "compete" against these things in the classroom? Students need to learn to pay attention in class so that they can learn to focus on a future job. Are the companies they work for going to need to compete with Twitter and computer games? No, they will just be fired if they do not perform. I am so tired of hearing how "innovative" we need to be in the classroom. Learn how to read, write well, and speak eloquently and then we can talk about innovation.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



5768 → hstrytool · 2 days ago

Precisely. Our "task" is how to get them to DISENGAGE from their engaging gizmos so they can settle down, focus, and engage instead with the material.

I suggest this means telling them NO in ways the professoriate traditionally has never faced previously--and many aren't up to owing to our years of being told we had to please everyone.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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