

## GRADUATE STUDIES

### Preparing Future Faculty

In addition to excelling at research, The University of Texas at Austin prepares today's graduate students to become tomorrow's college and university professors through an innovative program. The Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program, which is run through the Office of Graduate Studies' Intellectual Entrepreneurship (IE) program, addresses the specific and daunting concerns of graduate students who wish to pursue a professional life in academe. PFF makes them more qualified job candidates, allowing students to explore different institutions and styles of teaching.

Developed by Rick Cherwitz, associate dean of graduate studies and IE director, UT's PFF program pairs students with professors to mentor them at one of the program's nearby partner institutions: Austin Community College, Huston-Tillotson College, Saint Edward's University, Southwestern University, and Southwest Texas State University. Although many have worked as teaching assistants at UT, PFF gives students invaluable experiences — from designing classes to lecturing to advising students — at institutions with different missions and student populations, thus enhancing their portfolios and making them more qualified job candidates.

One of the benefits to teaching in an environment

outside of the University is that students often feel they can explore new directions in their teaching strategies. "As much as I love UT and my department, it was a welcome change to meet with someone in the field who was not on my committee or responsible for giving me evaluations that might determine future funding or appointments," notes Stefanie Wichhart, a PhD candidate in history who worked with Professor Louise Heenan in an upper-division history course at St. Edward's University. "I felt comfortable asking my mentor challenging questions about teaching and history as a discipline and trying new things when I had the chance to lecture, because there wasn't an evaluation or future funding riding on it, as is often the case as a TA."

"Even though I've been teaching my own classes at UT for three years now, having [my mentor] observe my teaching and discussing his curriculum gives me insight into pedagogical techniques and ideas about how to present regional studies to students," writes Cory Lock, a PhD candidate in English. He worked with Professor Mark Busby, the director of the Center for the Study of the Southwest at Southwest Texas State University, and one of his interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate classes on the study of the Southwest.

"When I went into the PFF internship, I believed that teaching is performing, especially for undergrads," adds Jane Barnette, a theatre history PhD candidate, who guest taught an undergraduate the-

ater history class and a graduate dramatic theory class under the mentorship of John Fleming at Southwest Texas State University — himself a PFF program graduate. "John solidified that theory, because he approaches pedagogy much the same as I do."

Lecturing undergrads rather than simply serving as their teaching assistant affords many participants an exciting new perspective on teaching. Susan C. Cates, a PhD candidate in nutritional sciences, took on an adjunct faculty position while mentored by Sue Thompson at Southwest Texas State University. She comments, "One of the most significant challenges was finding a way to keep the students interested during lecture. Of course I was excited about the material, but how do I get them excited? I soon learned that if I enjoy teaching and learning, so will they. Enthusiasm is contagious, and as the classroom dynamic evolved, so did my teaching."

The importance of innovation and exploration — cornerstone philosophies of the IE program — is echoed throughout the PFF program. Says Wichhart, "In the spirit of the IE philosophy, the PFF internship gave me a chance to explore new methods of teaching and reexamine how my particular skills can be used in the small liberal arts college setting. I think that I have a much better sense of what college teaching is all about as a result of my internship."

Graduate students are not the only ones who rave about the benefits of PFF. In their

own reports, the participating professors have showered the program with praise. When asked if they would recommend this program to their faculty peers and if they themselves would host another PFF intern in the future, every faculty respondent answered, "Yes."

UT's PFF program plays an important role in job placement. "With a PFF internship to my credit, no one questioned the seriousness of my commitment to academics or teaching," writes Eric Matsumoto, who received his PhD in civil engineering in 2000 and is now a faculty member at the California State University at Sacramento. "Most faculty members were surprised to find out that such a program existed and were delighted that I had such experience."

"Even more important than helping students find jobs," says Dean Cherwitz, "is the way PFF enables future professors to discover their passion for teaching."

"At some of our meetings, [my mentor will] ask if I still want to teach," writes Amanda Walker, an anthropology PhD candidate who lectured, led discussion groups, and held writing conferences while interning with Professor Vanessa Davis at Huston-Tillotson College. "Behind my answer of 'yes' is the recognition, gained in part through this experience, of both the art of teaching and the heart of teaching, neither of which can exist without the other and neither of which I would give up the chance to express." — Sarah A. Rodriguez