

“TAMU CIRTLL: Integrating and Enhancing Existing Institutional Initiatives to Form an Inquiry-Based Pedagogical Model for Future Faculty Development”

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At any large research intensive institution, there are often multiple initiatives contributing to the development of graduate students as future faculty. CIRTLL at Texas A&M (TAMU CIRTLL) serves to network and enhance the activities of these existing programs. By utilizing existing resources and integrating CIRTLL Network resources, a new model emerges grounded in a local context.

Rooted in an institutional initiative to infuse inquiry into as many courses as feasible, TAMU CIRTLL is working with the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and the student-led Graduate Teaching Academy (GTA) to provide graduate students with training in inquiry-based pedagogy to develop a knowledge base serving not only the graduate students' future careers, but serving to develop a cohort of students who can partner with faculty to meet institutional goals serving undergraduate courses utilizing Inquiry-Guided Learning (IGL).

The desired outcomes are achieved through a multi-tiered model of professional development. At the first level, graduate students participate in a year-long program through the GTA developing (1) knowledge in teaching and learning styles and concepts, (2) teaching philosophy and portfolio, and (3) service experience modeling future employers' expectations for faculty. This experience is composed of weekly seminars given by campus faculty and invited guest speakers, hands-on workshops, and partnering with a teaching mentor to discuss classroom observations of teaching styles of five professors from at least two different academic domains. The events in this program are open to all graduate students at Texas A&M irrespective of their desire to work towards completing the requirements and obtaining "GTA Fellow" credentials. In 2007-2008, 180 graduate students attended at least one of the GTA events with 81 completing the certificate requirements.

Expanding on the GTA Fellows program, the second level develops student knowledge in inquiry-based pedagogy. In the newly formed "GTA Senior Fellow" program, GTA Fellows will engage in a learning community to begin summer 2008 designed to develop pedagogical skills infused with CIRTLL core ideals. These skills may be utilized in the student's future career, current teaching responsibilities, or to progress to the third level.

Level three provides participants with real-world experience by partnering with faculty to develop and implement inquiry-based courses and contributing to departmental efforts to meet institutional goals. Implementation of a project with a campus faculty member earns the GTA Senior Fellow the credentials of "CIRTLL Fellow". At this level, the graduate student will have developed deep knowledge about inquiry-based learning and course design as well as expertise in the three CIRTLL pillars of Teaching as Research, Learning through Diversity, and Learning Communities.

Through this model, TAMU demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between developing future faculty and meeting current institutional needs. The investment of time and resources by the Texas A&M results in a mutually beneficial partnership between the institution and the graduate students. While the students gain real world experience and professional development, faculty gain access to a population of students with the skills to design and implement inquiry-guided learning curriculum, and the institution benefits from meeting a broader goal of impacting undergraduate education.