

# TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS 77843-3257

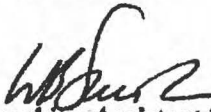


July 31, 1996

Office of  
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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Dr. William L. Perry,  
Associate Provost and Dean of Faculties

**FROM:** William B. Smith, Chair   
Review Committee of the Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program  
(TATEP)

**SUBJECT:** Attached Committee Report

The TATEP Review Committee submits for your use the attached report of its findings regarding this important program. To summarize, this committee recommends:

- Appropriate administrative officers reissue the mandate for training of GATs.
- College deans be charged with ensuring compliance to the mandate.
- Successful departmental/college training programs be highlighted, publicized and made available for consultation/training of weaker or non-compliant groups.
- The CTE program be formally evaluated by surveying both graduate advisors in user departments and GATs after one year. Restructure the program, if necessary.
- A liaison/steering committee for TATEP consisting of college representatives and CTE personnel be initiated.
- College and departmental training programs be formally evaluated.
- College training programs where found lacking be initiated.

Our efforts revealed that the colleges are not uniformly supporting either the CTE or in-college programs. Disparities exist within college, also. Thus, the committee recommends that each university component seriously conduct a self-study of its efforts by reconsidering expected outcomes and comparing those goals to current results.

xc: Committee Members  
Center for Teaching Excellence

# **Committee Report on the Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program (TATEP)**

July 31, 1996

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Review Committee for the Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program (TATEP) is charged with the task of examining the program and procedures that currently are in place. TATEP is designed to ensure that new graduate assistants teaching (GATs) receive a proper orientation both into teaching and to the unique features of Texas A&M University. This program is carried out through the auspices of the Center for Teacher Excellence (CTE).

Mandated by Academic Programs Council in May 1991 as part of a recommendation made during the University's reaccreditation process, GAT orientation has a centralized beginning with the CTE and is followed up with programs in other more traditional academic units (colleges and departments). The Review Committee conducted its deliberations on the extent of both CTE and academic unit programs without knowledge of fiscal considerations. Many programs at other institutions are more centrally administered and heavily financially underwritten.

In this report the TATEP Review Committee will

- Describe the overall process,
- Review the scope of the CTE presentations and evaluations,
- Sample the efforts made by colleges and departments,
- Report on programs at other institutions, and
- Draw conclusions and make recommendations for future activities in this important educational preparation area.

## **II. CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE PROGRAM**

### **II.1 The Program**

Before classes start in the fall and spring semesters, the Center for Teaching Excellence conducts a one-day program for new Graduate Assistants Teaching. The program currently serves between five and six hundred new teaching assistants each year, with most participating in the program that is offered before the fall term.

The university-wide part of TATEP is administered through the CTE and relies heavily on the CTE staff for its content. Other key professionals on campus participate on a volunteer basis in areas of special expertise. Also on a volunteer basis, more experienced graduate students help lead sessions and assist in question/answer sessions with the new GATs. Some experienced GATs have developed and lead new sessions based on needs that they have identified.

The CTE/TATEP program, along with college and departmental efforts, is intended to introduce and familiarize new GATs both with general teaching tools and also local educational idiosyncrasies. Conducted in one day, the CTE provides one-hour, simultaneous sessions throughout the day. These sessions are designed to meet broad, general informational needs and to avoid unnecessary duplication with college/departmental training efforts. For example, the January 1996 program included sessions on the following topics:

- First Day of Class (either lecture or laboratory)
- Teaching Tips
- TAMU Rules and Regulations
- Office Hours
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Culture Shock: Internationals
- Graduate Student Services
- Aggie Traditions
- Consulting Help
- Multicultural Efforts and Understandings.

Each of these sessions is lead ('facilitated') either by a CTE staff member, TAMU faculty member or, in some cases, by a more experienced graduate teaching assistant.

Additionally, CTE constructs and distributes practical educational handout material as reference for further use. The handout topics are those commonly encountered by teaching faculty, e.g., effective lecturing techniques, use of audiovisual equipment, time/stress management, etc. The CTE also makes this material available for use by any faculty member.

## II.2 Program Evaluation

At the end of the CTE sessions the participants are invited to complete a written evaluation of the program. While as expected these completed forms yield much less information than is needed to thoroughly evaluate the program, they do effectively provide some feedback on individual instructors and on the topical choices. Additionally, the evaluation forms give an indication of GAT plans to attend college and/or departmental sessions.

### **II.3 Program Management**

The program is managed by the CTE under the supervision of the Associate Provost and Dean of Faculties. The CTE is responsible for

- planning and conducting the university-wide aspects of the program,
- coordinating university-wide activities with college and departmental efforts,
- monitoring compliance by departments to the requirement that all new GATs complete appropriate components of the program within the first semester of employment, and
- reporting compliance to the Associate Provost and Dean of Faculties.

### **II.4 GAT Evaluation**

Additionally, the CTE is responsible for collecting copies of departmental GAT performance evaluation instruments. GATs are to be evaluated by departments each semester and, if rated as deficient, are to be placed on a one-semester probationary status. The CTE will be so notified and will offer the probational GAT programs for improvement in teaching ability. If a GAT subsequently receives a second deficient evaluation, then the GAT either must be retrained, reassigned or dropped as a GAT. The CTE is responsible for monitoring probational GATs and reporting compliance.

## **III. COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENTAL EFFORTS**

### **College of Agriculture and Life Sciences**

There is no college-wide program in COALS, but departments conduct training at various levels ranging from a three SCH course to informal mentoring. Additionally, in their eight of ten departments responding to a recent survey, four of them mentor graduate teachers, two have routine meetings and two have very formal, successful course credit programs. All new GATs are required to attend the CTE program.

### **College of Architecture**

This college has but a few GATs (typically three/year), however careful supervision of these individuals is undertaken. They are always assigned to teach in multi-section courses that are controlled and coordinated by faculty. The GATs are directly supervised in their teaching efforts, and they are mentored and evaluated by the course coordinator.

### **College of Business Administration**

The College of Business Administration reports it conducts both college and department-level programs. CBA requires all GATs to attend the CTE program, and additionally, to attend a college-wide two day program that emphasizes motivation,

TAMU traditions, computer and audiovisuals usage, and stress management. There is some duplication in the CTE and CBA programs. Business GATs also must participate in a one SCH course in which they review and write reports on published articles in business education, do a book report, participate in an interactive (and disruptive) classroom simulation, and discuss gender and minority sensitivities. The departments follow with mentoring.

### **College of Education**

This college requires all GATs to complete a three SCH course in the methodologies of college-level instruction. This course is lead by Dr. Glen Johnson, an acknowledged educational expert in this topic. The results of the course have been quite satisfactory (see Johnson 1996).

### **Dwight Look College of Engineering**

Look College reports that it conducts supplemental programs that are both college-wide and departmental. The college-wide program consists two consecutive one SCH courses that emphasize the training necessary to become an academic engineer. These courses feature guest speakers each week and discuss teaching techniques, and include specialized instruction in sensitivity to female, minority student and harassment issues.

Eight of the engineering's ten departments have additional formal instruction of GATs. Most departmental efforts are directed toward laboratory safety issues and use of equipment, but many departments also include instruction into other broader teaching issues. Mentoring by teaching faculty and follow-up evaluation of teaching effectiveness are done. It was also reported that some female and minority students had expressed some disappointment in the CTE programs concerning issues of specific concern to women and international graduate students.

### **College of Geosciences**

The College of Geosciences has no college-wide program, but does require that the students participate in the CTE program. Departmental follow-up efforts include meetings which specific topics are discussed. Faculty mentoring of GATs is emphasized.

### **College of Liberal Arts**

The College of Liberal Arts indicated that all new GATs were required to attend the CTE program. There is no college-wide program, but several departments have outstanding efforts. For example, English has a three SCH course, with follow-up and evaluation, videotaping and class visitation by mentors. The College also reported that several graduate students had expressed some disappointment with the CTE program.

### **College of Science**

While requiring attendance in the CTE presentations, the College of Science has no college-wide program. Departmental efforts include formal course offerings in three of the five departments. The remaining two departments had regular, supervised weekly meetings of the GATs in which specific topics of pedagogy and process are discussed.

### **College of Veterinary Medicine**

An active training program for all GATs in the College of Veterinary Medicine has languished since the death of its leader. The program will be re-instituted during 1996-97.

## **IV. PROGRAMS AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

Summaries and documentation from other institutions' programs were reviewed by the committee. Many have far more extensive programs than ours. Formal evaluation of these programs is not a common feature, however.

### *Ohio State University*

Ohio State has a central organization that is assigned tasks that are similar to those undertaken by the CTE. However, OSU's GAT program seems more extensive than is CTE's. For example, the GAT session held prior to the fall term consists of all or part of five days. Included are sessions of general educational interest as well as some departmental presentations.

Additionally, their center provides educational consulting sessions to individuals and departments, departmental and university-wide workshops, lecture sponsorship, and a houses a library of pertinent references. Also their center produces faculty handbooks and aids in project planning and coordination. OSU is discussing extending their efforts to include a longer term development of teaching faculty, i.e. from graduate teaching assistants through beginning faculty members.

### *University of Minnesota*

The University of Minnesota program differs from the TAMU program in several respects. First, the program is offered through the human resources department. Second, its faculty and GAT enrichment program has several facets: classroom consulting services, customized workshops and discussions, and both electronic and hard copy resource collections.

Of most interest are the workshops as they typically cover active learning topics and techniques, inclusive teaching methods, assessment tools, lecture/presentation preparation, instructional development, and university-wide writing effort. In addition, a pre-term orientation session for new GATs is conducted.

### *University of Washington*

The University of Washington has a centralized program, similar in nature to those discussed above. The unique features of the UW program are in instructional computing and communications efforts. Those topics are not emphasized in the CTE program. Both classroom computer usage and distance learning are having increased effects and widespread implications to instruction at all major research institutions.

### *University of Texas - Austin*

The University of Texas's centralized program has activities that are similar to those of Ohio State University. The unique qualities of this program are the emphases placed on international graduate assistants. These directions include efforts into language development, familiarization with American higher education and certification of these GATs, among other issues.

### *Syracuse University*

Syracuse has one of the most extensive programs in the nation. As part of their all-university graduate orientation, breakout sessions are held on virtually all of the areas mentioned at the other institutions. Syracuse is unique primarily because of the size and extent of the effort. The GAT orientation is a five-day program over a weekend. It provides breakfasts and other light meals, and it is mandatory, of course.

## V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review committee is impressed with the growth in and breadth of the university-wide GAT training program administered by the CTE. This part of the TATEP is limited both by the amount of time allotted to the effort (one day) and the commitment level that is evident at college and departmental levels. The committee notes, however, that many of the features of our sister institutions' programs are also being offered by the CTE to GATs here (e.g., in-class observation and videotaping, consultations, teaching portfolios, lending resources, and incentive grants).

Because of time constraints, during its investigations the committee was unable to sample either the graduate advisors or GATs directly. Only comments and opinions were expressed. Thus, since the training effort is an important part of TAMU's effort to provide quality instruction at all levels, a more extensive evaluation of the program is recommended. Additionally, it became increasingly apparent during our deliberations that college/departmental efforts are at best uneven, and in some cases nonexistent.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made in an attempt to improve on the program:

- **Appropriate administrative officers reissue the mandate for training of GATs.**
- **College deans be charged with ensuring compliance to the mandate.**

- **Successful departmental/college training programs be highlighted, publicized and made available for consultation/training of weaker or non-compliant groups.**
- **The CTE program be formally evaluated by surveying both graduate advisors in user departments and GATs after one year. Restructure the program, if necessary.**
- **A liaison/steering committee consisting of college representatives and CTE personnel for TATEP be initiated.**
- **College and departmental training programs be formally evaluated.**
- **College training programs where found lacking be initiated.**

In summary, the committee recommends that each university component seriously conduct a self-study of its efforts by reconsidering expected outcomes and comparing those goals to current results.

#### **REFERENCE MATERIAL USED**

Recent CTE schedules  
Other university programs  
College and departmental efforts

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

William B. Smith, College of Science, Chair  
Karan L. Watson, Dwight Look College of Engineering  
Ben D. Welch, College of Business Administration and Graduate School of Business  
Richard K. Curry, College of Liberal Arts  
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