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The Role of the Sheridan Center: Professional Development for Brown Graduate Students

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Graduate school serves many different purposes for those enrolled in advanced degree programs. In addition to learning how to participate in the scholarly discourse of their chosen field, many graduate students learn how to participate in the professional life of their chosen career as academics. The Sheridan Center supports graduate students and faculty in developing their teaching potential through educational programs, services, and publications. Also a locus for professional development for Brown graduate students and faculty, the Center offers lesser-known programs that are designed to help students develop their professional lives in preparation for careers in the academy.

Examples of professional development services provided by the Sheridan Center for graduate students include consultations that help them prepare to give conference papers, seminar papers, poster presentations, and other presentations. The Center also assists graduate students who are near completion to document their teaching in advance of applying for teaching positions. This includes the preparation of curriculum vitae, cover letters, sample syllabi, and statements of teaching philosophy. Consultations are available to help academic job candidates prepare for job talks and interviews. In addition, the Sheridan Center sponsors seminars led by liberal arts college faculty that introduce graduate students to the experience of teaching in a liberal arts college. Under the aegis of the Brown Graduate School and the Wheaton College Provost, the Center will also be facilitating a program in

which selected Brown graduate students will have the opportunity to gain teaching experience and receive professional mentoring at Wheaton , a nearby liberal arts college. Below is a more complete description of the professional development services offered at the Sheridan Center .

Presentation Consultations: Presentations in the academy take a wide variety of forms, but getting one's point across to both experts and non-experts is a fundamental goal. Many departments provide their graduate students with excellent in-department preparation, but getting feedback from colleagues in other disciplines can significantly improve the clarity and directness of a presentation. Trained Sheridan Center Teaching Consultants are available to help Brown and RISD graduate students prepare for all kinds of presentation situations. Graduate students are invited to request consultations for feedback on the effectiveness of their presentations before appearing at a conference or presenting a lecture or seminar within their department. Consultations are also available for students preparing for academic job talks and academic interviews.

The Teaching Consultants observe, videotape, and offer immediate feedback on such presentations. They focus on helping presenters to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively by giving feedback on issues such as organization and structure, dynamism of delivery and clarity of speaking style, and effectiveness of slides or other technologies. Interested graduate students may sign up for this free service on the Center's Web site (www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/consulting/#presentation) where they may also choose whether to be observed by one or two consultants and can also request to be matched, if possible, with consultants from either within or outside of their academic department or division (Life and Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, or Humanities).

Professional Development Seminar (Teaching Certificate III): Recipients of the Sheridan Teaching Certificates I and II are encouraged to take part in the Professional Development Seminar in the year prior to going on the job market. Sheridan Center Associate Directors, Janet Rankin (Engineering) and Laura Hess (East Asian Studies), run this yearlong, six-session seminar in which participants develop teaching portfolios for use in academic job applications. In order to foster collegial exchange, the seminar is limited to twenty participants and uses a WebCT site that allows participants to read and give feedback on each other's work. Sessions focus on writing a teaching philosophy, constructing a syllabus, preparing a CV, writing a cover letter, and preparing for job interviews. The series culminates in a dinner presentation of the completed portfolios. Past participants have reported that the teaching portfolios they created in the seminar were very helpful in

ensuring their success on the job market. One wrote, "I left with a first draft of my teaching portfolio which I think played a large role in several of my job offers." Many also report that they revise the Teaching Portfolios created in the seminar throughout their careers, as they prepare for tenure / promotion reviews.

Brown/Wheaton Teaching Laboratory in the Liberal Arts: Brown and Wheaton College in nearby Norton MA are collaborating on the development of the "Brown/Wheaton Teaching Laboratory in the Liberal Arts." The goal will be to allow a limited number of selected Brown graduate student to gain experience teaching in a liberal arts environment by giving them the opportunity to teach their own class for one semester as interns at Wheaton . While teaching there, graduate students will work closely with Wheaton faculty mentors to develop their teaching practice and they will be given the opportunity to participate in the unique multidisciplinary collegiality that characterizes the liberal arts faculty experience. Participation in Sheridan Center programs will help to both prepare and qualify students for these positions at Wheaton . Those graduate students holding or in process of earning Sheridan Teaching Certificate III will be considered ideal candidates for available positions at Wheaton .

Seminars on Teaching in the Liberal Arts Environment: The Sheridan Center offered a successful seminar this fall that brought Brown graduate students together with Wheaton College faculty to discuss the experience of teaching at a liberal arts college. Graduate students from all disciplines, many considering applying for jobs at liberal arts colleges, attended the discussion with three Wheaton faculty members; a tenured professor, a junior faculty member who was recently a Brown graduate student, and the pilot intern of the Brown/ Wheaton Teaching Laboratory (see above). Participants reported that the seminar not only confirmed their suspicions about the differences between teaching at liberal arts colleges and research institutions, but also provided new information that will help them to make decisions about where to seek work as they near completion of their doctorates.

A second Seminar on Teaching in a Liberal Arts Environment will be offered on February 19 from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. at the Center.