

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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Royce Professors Host Seminars for Graduate Students

The first three faculty members appointed as Royce Family Professors of Teaching Excellence have hosted two seminar lunches for Brown graduate students this past year. The Royce Family Professorships in Teaching Excellence recognize and reward faculty for their commitment to teaching and advising students, to pedagogical innovation and excellence, and to scholarship and University service. Professors Karen Fischer (Geological Sciences), Barrymore Bogues (Africana Studies) and Sheila Bonde (History of Art & Architecture/ Dean of the Graduate School) have worked together to offer graduate students the chance to discuss the parallel endeavors of teaching and research which define an academic career in a research university.

The first luncheon seminar session, held at the Sheridan Center, on May 10, 2005 focused on "Balancing and Integrating Research and Teaching." A packed room of graduate students had the chance to hear these distinguished scholars and teachers share philosophies and strategies about how they accomplish their professional goals. The second lunch, held on November 29, 2005 at the Sheridan Center, was devoted to discussing "Striving for Symbiosis between Scholarship and the Classroom". Again, graduate students from across the disciplines came to address this issue in an open forum setting.

Below the three Royce Family Professors share their essential points with the community at large. If you have responses or questions, please contact the Center.

Barrymore Bogues:

The academic enterprise is a challenging one. But perhaps its most challenging dimension is the engagement of being a scholar /teacher. How to balance and integrate teaching with learning, research and writing is challenging, particularly since all of these activities have some relationship to each other. At the heart of this challenge is teaching. It is time consuming and at first blush seems to be structured to draw the scholar away from research and writing. But this first look is not quite accurate because effective teaching does not take place without learning. In other words, preparation for pedagogy is not only a craft but requires deep consideration of the subject matter at hand. This kind of consideration in turn means that the scholar uses preparation time to work out a series of questions. The classroom then becomes a learning space, one where interactive knowledge practices occur.

In trying to work through some of the tensions inherent in the academy and the tendency for a peculiar form of professionalization which privileges narrow considerations, some intellectuals like Edward Said and Stuart Hall have attempted to make distinctions between intellectual work and academic work. In the case of Said, the distinction circles around what he calls the “amateur” and the “professional.” In this frame the “amateur” is one who works on critical questions while “speaking truth to power.” On the other hand the professional is one who is primarily driven by narrow disciplinary concerns and acts more in tandem with Julian Benda’s definition of the intellectual. Stuart Hall complicates the issue by suggesting that intellectuals raise profoundly critical questions that open new doors for us to think about various issues, while the academic frames questions within a set of already conceived disciplinary protocols. Both of these seminal figures raise questions about how a “life of the mind” can be lived in the contemporary period.

So we come back to where we began ... how can we resolve the apparent tensions of the scholar/ teacher? This is a dilemma that many graduate students have. It is a primary reason for the seminars on teaching and research which I am currently engaged with in the Sheridan Center.

Sheila Bonde:

At the presentation of the Royce professorship in 2004, I spoke about the need for active listening in teaching. “All too often, we are eager to give information. The older I get, the more I’ve learned to shut up and listen,” I said. “Students need to

gain confidence in their ideas, and in their ability to wrestle with the complexities of interpretation.”

At the Royce lunches in 2005, I discussed my teaching in the field at the site of my archaeological excavation in Soissons, France. “Field work is truly collaborative, in that students are in direct contact with the physical evidence we are discovering. Their interpretations are crucial to the research enterprise.” I discussed with the graduate students present at the lunch the ways in which graduate students, in particular, are often my mentors in their fields of expertise, such as physical anthropology or ground-penetrating radar, two allied fields that inform archaeology.

Karen Fischer:

As you transition from your graduate studies and move out into faculty positions across academia, creating positive feedback between your research and teaching endeavors will directly contribute to scholarly productivity, exciting teaching, and (hopefully) a saner lifestyle. Means for developing this feedback will obviously vary between disciplines and across different university and college settings. However, some of the strategies that have proven effective at Brown are integrating graduate students, undergraduates, and faculty in research groups and course teaching teams, and incorporating research in courses as lecture examples, lab and field trip exercises, and class research projects.

One of our ongoing research projects, the TUCAN Broadband Seismometer Experiment, provides an illustration of several of these strategies. The goal of this experiment is to better understand subduction zone melting processes in Central America and worldwide. Our method is to use earthquake waves recorded by an array of seismic stations to image the crust and mantle beneath the volcanic arc of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The project (funded by the NSF MARGINS Program) is a joint effort between our group at Brown and scientists at Boston University, the Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica, and INETER in Nicaragua.

So what are the research-teaching feedbacks from this project? First, an excellent team of students, including Alexis Walker '06 and graduate students Kate Rychert and David Abt, has gained valuable field experience either installing or maintaining the 48 array stations in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Second, data from the experiment are enabling a series of independent but interlocking analyses, including studies by three Ph.D. students (Kate, David and Mariela Salas) and three undergrads (Laura Martin '06, Scott French '05 and Alexis). Regular group meetings to discuss results

and related papers from the literature add depth and momentum to the research experience and encourage the exchange of advice and ideas among all members of the group. We allow the focus of group meetings to evolve over time and often draw in other students and faculty.

In a third research-teaching feedback, we have been using data from the experiment as the basis for a class research project in Earthquake Seismology (GE 165), a course for upper-level undergrads and grad students that I am co-teaching this semester with Don Forsyth. The goal of the study is to more precisely locate the aftershocks of a large earthquake that occurred in Nicaragua in August, 2005, in order to delineate the earthquake fault plane and examine its relationship to the eruption of a nearby volcano that occurred within the same week. Benefits for the students in the course include hands-on work with real data, a deeper understanding of how seismological theory is applied in analysis methods, and the excitement of original results. Although designing this type of project for a course is time-consuming, resulting benefits for our broader research effort are significant: incentive to try out new methods and ideas, a means of drawing new students into the research group, and, last but not least, new research findings that often lead to published papers.