

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

BROWN UNIVERSITY • VOLUME 9 / NUMBER 1 • SEPTEMBER 2004



Summer Mentors Program: An Opportunity for Enrichment for Graduate Student Instructors in Brown Summer School

Charlotte Biltekoff

American Civilization and Sheridan Center Graduate Teaching Fellow

The Sheridan Center has launched a new program to support graduate students teaching courses for Summer Studies in 2004. This program of one-on-one mentoring for instructors augments two teaching preparation workshops for graduate student Summer Studies instructors held at the Sheridan Center during the school year; the fall proposal workshop and the spring syllabus workshop.

Now in its second year, the Summer Mentors Program responds to the fact that approximately fifty (50) graduate students teach courses each summer to graduate, undergraduate, or high-school students attending Brown Summer Studies. These intensive courses, lasting from one to seven weeks, are a challenge and an opportunity for instructors. They draw highly motivated students with unusually varied backgrounds for classes that meet from seven to fifteen hours per week (plus, in some cases, more time spent in labs). Because of their intensity, the unique challenges presented by the varied constituency, and the fact that graduate students design and teach these courses independently, the Sheridan Center recognizes them as a potential teaching laboratory and an excellent opportunity to enrich graduate students' training in reflective teaching practices.

The aim of the mentoring program is to provide a flexible service that responds to the individual needs of instructors whether they are experienced or novice, teaching high-school

students or graduate students, and whether their course runs for one, three or seven weeks. Therefore, the Sheridan Center has retained its trained, experienced graduate student Teaching Consultants (who conduct Individual Teaching Consultations and Presentation Consultations during the school year) to meet with Summer Studies instructors on a one-on-one basis during the summer. We have provided a schedule of available consultants throughout the summer that is designed to accommodate the summer teaching schedule. Each week mentors from each division are available for a two-hour period. Instructors are invited to make appointments with the mentor or to drop in at their convenience.

Graduate student Summer School instructors are invited to meet with mentors to discuss any aspect of their course, from planning to final assessments. We have encouraged instructors to meet with mentors to:

- Discuss and revise a syllabus and other plans prior to the start of the course.
- Discuss diagnostic tools that will help assess the preparation levels of the students in the class, and strategies for teaching students with varied backgrounds.
- Get ideas about how to plan stimulating, productive and varied lessons for each day of the course.
- Learn new tools for encouraging student participation.
- Get suggestions about how to design assignments and other ways of figuring out how well your students are learning.
- Discuss any other concerns including: grading or writing evaluations, attendance, discipline, authority, interpersonal dynamics, authority issues.

The Sheridan Center staff sees summer teaching as an outstanding opportunity for graduate students to enrich their teaching practices and we are dedicated to supporting this endeavor throughout the proposal, planning, and teaching stages of the process. We look forward to offering our **Summer Proposal Workshop** (October 26, 4:30-6:00pm) and **Summer Syllabus Workshop** (April 13, 4:30-6:00pm) next year as well as continuing to develop our pilot program for mentoring summer instructors.