

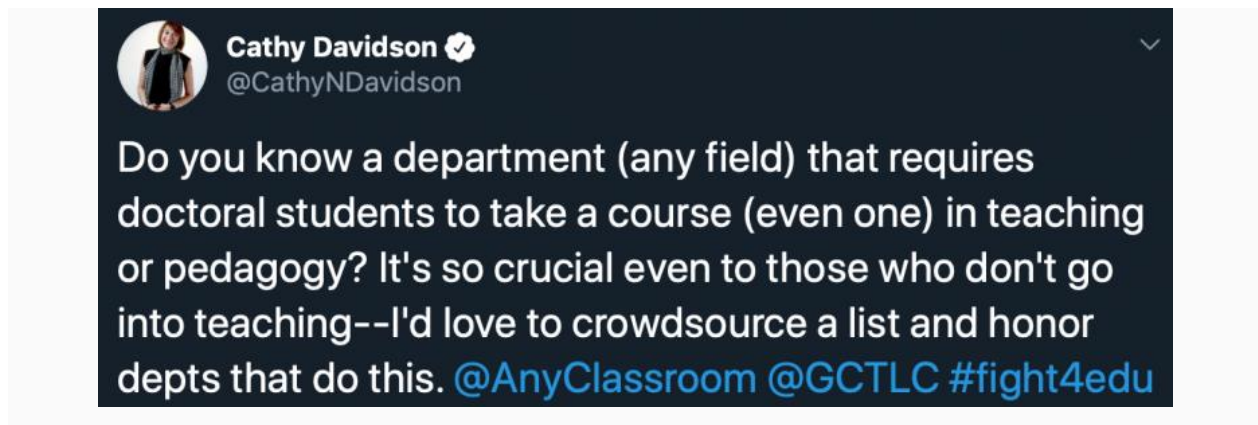
# INSIDE HIGHER ED

## Required Pedagogy

Online conversation shines a spotlight on graduate programs that teach students how to teach -- and those programs that don't.

By [Colleen Flaherty](#)

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Twitter

Most Ph.D.s go on to teach in some way, even if they don't want or land teaching positions: they find jobs that require them to communicate their work to the public, for example, or to colleagues within an organization. And of course many Ph.D.s do still want, and snag, part- or full-time professorships across a variety of institution types.

Yet graduate education has historically treated this fact a kind of inconvenient truth, overlooking or flat out ignoring students' need for pedagogical training. That's explicit pedagogical training, not the sink-or-swim method adopted by so many programs that throw their graduate student instructors into teaching undergraduates with no real preparation.

Scholar Cathy Davidson -- and, evidently, scores of individual programs and groups -- want to change that. Davidson, distinguished professor of English at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, recently asked her Twitter followers to share names of doctoral programs that actually require students to learn how to teach. The effort took off, with Davidson and colleagues creating a Google document to inform future discussions about this topic. What models are out there? Who isn't doing anything.

[The document](#) includes dozens of programs thus far, and the ongoing [Twitter conversation](#) names scores more. Davidson says the next big step is to all ask programs that aren't on the list why not.

"We were crowdsourcing an inventory of what graduate departments do to prepare the students who are often teaching their own undergraduates," Davidson said Thursday. "It seems irresponsible not to require some form of pedagogical training, whether a course or some other intensive training, for your own graduate students who are teaching your own undergraduates." Davidson's list is humanities-heavy -- probably unsurprising given her own field and the fact that the particularly poor faculty job market in the humanities has led some graduate programs to rethink how they approach graduate training altogether. It's also far from comprehensive or official. But both it and yet-to-be-added social media comments include some programs in the natural sciences and other fields.

Doctoral students in the School of Physical Education, Performance and Sport Leadership at Springfield College, for example, take a Preparing Future Faculty series that consists of three semester-long classes: a seminar in contemporary issues related to higher education, physical education and sport; a course in instructional effectiveness, evidence-based practices, course design, curriculum development and reflective teaching; and a seminar about faculty roles. The program says that a fourth course, on scholarly writing and publication, also will be required starting next year.

Georgia Institute Technology requires all teaching assistants in the School of Economics to complete the university's [Tech to Teaching](#) certificate. The program includes two courses, in teaching fundamentals and course design, and a teaching capstone of teaching or co-teaching a course. (Such certificate programs exist on other campuses for students who want to become professors but aren't necessarily required.)

The University of California at Berkeley's Academic Senate Graduate Council Policy on Appointments and Mentoring of Graduate Student Instructors even requires that all graduate instructors -- regardless of program -- attend a day-long teaching conference at the campus GSI Teaching and Resource Center and complete an online course on ethics in teaching. Most significantly, they must all enroll in a pedagogy course for first-time graduate instructors within their departments.

### **Making Teaching a Priority**

The Council of Graduate Schools doesn't have specific information on which graduate programs require training in pedagogy. But it has long promoted the idea that graduate programs should provide students the tools they need to be teachers in various capacities -- including at different institution types -- through the [Preparing Future Faculty](#) initiative (of which Springfield College is part).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities originally partnered with the council on Preparing Future Faculty. Terrel Rhodes, vice president of quality, curriculum and assessment at the association, said that many of the program's elements -- think student learning outcomes, pedagogy and assignment design -- "have been inserted into graduate programs in many, many places," typically as one course. Yet that's insufficient for the many graduate students who secure faculty jobs, especially teaching-intensive positions, he said.

Rhodes's organization therefore strongly encourages departments and institutions to offer students multiple opportunities to build teaching expertise

within their programs. Disciplinary associations “also need to make this a priority for graduate-level institutions to make it happen,” he said.

Accreditation standards could also apply pressure, as could institutions by incorporating evidence of teaching into hiring standards.

The “disincentive,” however, Rhodes said, is that research expertise brings in money for the institutions and disciplines “in ways good teaching does not.”

And while many institutions known for research do pay attention to teaching, he add, faculty reward and recognition systems don’t necessarily reflect that.

Professional organizations have weighed in here. The American Historical Association, through its Career Diversity initiative, for example, has pushed graduate programs to adopt a more student-centered approach to training historians, to prepare them for work inside and outside

academe. Underpinning that effort is the notion -- as articulated by Jim

Grossman, executive director, in a 2015 [essay](#) for *Perspectives on History* -- that “to be a historian is to be a teacher.”

“We have failed to integrate the teaching of history into the profession of being a historian -- other than by example, or perhaps by sending our students across campus to teaching and learning centers generally considered marginal to the main pathway,” Grossman wrote.

Perhaps things are changing for the better: the AHA's survey of history departments found nearly half of respondents had a pedagogy course within their programs. Grossman said this week that it’s not just about learning how to teach, which “implies specific methods and strategies.” It’s about “learning how to think about teaching,” which necessitates taking the [scholarship of teaching and learning in history](#), across multiple audiences, as seriously as research.

“Nobody says, ‘Here are some strategies and tips on research, now go off and do it,’” Grossman said.

The Modern Language Association has made a series of recommendations concerning teacher training. A 2013 [report](#) on improving institutional

circumstances for students says that, “Given the large amount of teaching done by graduate students, departments and universities should provide ongoing training and support to prepare graduate students for a variety of teaching situations.” Specific recommendations include providing pedagogy workshops, access to teaching mentors and opportunities to design their own courses or versions of a syllabus.

The National Science Foundation does not require that grantees in its research traineeship program include pedagogical elements in their proposals. But some do, and the program over all promotes communication skills. Nirmala Kannankutty, acting director of the Division of Graduate Education at the NSF, said that being “a good teacher requires good pedagogical and communication skills,” and that communication is a “core element of professional skills development.” Those aren’t the only necessary skills graduate students need to acquire, however, she said, hence the flexibility in proposals on that front.

Leonard Cassuto, professor of English at Fordham University and a vocal proponent of graduate education reform, is co-writing a forthcoming book from Johns Hopkins University Press on why all students need to be trained as educators, across contexts.

“Even if they don't work in a formal school classroom, their teaching skills are a fundamental part of their package,” Cassuto said this week. For too long, he added, graduate education -- including pedagogical training -- has been looked as a byproduct of faculty research work. That is, students will somehow learn to be faculty members by a kind of osmosis, working alongside their advisers.

At Fordham, English doctoral students take a two-semester pedagogical training sequence, Cassuto said. The first term involves a seminar on pedagogical theory and practices and shadowing a more senior graduate

student instructor. The second term is a practicum, where students share their experiences and get feedback on teaching their own students.

What's the ideal number of courses? Cassuto said that two is better than one, but that one is still much better than none.

Jason Herbert, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities who is now teaching at a private high school in Florida as he finishes his dissertation, would agree. He said this week that he didn't have a required pedagogy course in graduate school and that he's had to teach himself -- with the help of colleagues and other educators on Twitter.

"I've been fortunate to be surrounded by really talented educators who have shared their thoughts and experiences with me," he said. "But much of what I've learned has been through trial and error."

Herbert's department doesn't require a pedagogy class, but it does offer workshops for teaching assistants. The department says that faculty members with whom these TAs work are also supposed provide pedagogical support and guidance.

"We see the TA appointment as a type of teaching practicum," said Howard Louthan, professor of history and director of graduate studies at Minnesota.

As for the idea -- still held by some -- that teaching can't really be taught, Cassuto, of Fordham, called "bullshit."

"You can teach teaching. Teaching is craft, not just an art," he said. To begin, Cassuto continued, there's learning to promote good discussions (no yes-or-no questions, for example), and learning how to design a syllabus so that a course arcs and doesn't just plateau.

Melissa Johnson, an Oregon-based historian and graduate of the University of Michigan, said that "teaching comes more naturally to some people than

others, but that only goes so far.” Even “natural” teachers need to “constantly work on learning how to do it better.”

Johnson took one course in pedagogy and attended a short training during her Ph.D. program but later helped design and adopt a multiple-course requirement. Most of her own teaching training was “on the job” and she would have liked more preparation, she said. But there’s a timeliness to getting teaching right, as well.

“It’s never been more important to be reflective about our classroom work,” Johnson said. Because university funding is under threat and students are going into debt, there’s a value argument for good teaching preparation. Inclusion is a major concern, too.

“If we want to work for more equity in schools and in the workforce, we have to figure out how to reach all of our students.”

[https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/13/online-conversation-shines-spotlight-graduate-programs-teach-students-how-teach?utm\\_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm\\_campaign=9893a3c3f1-WNU\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1fcbc04421-9893a3c3f1-199133009&mc\\_cid=9893a3c3f1&mc\\_eid=6f67a838c9](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/13/online-conversation-shines-spotlight-graduate-programs-teach-students-how-teach?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=9893a3c3f1-WNU_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-9893a3c3f1-199133009&mc_cid=9893a3c3f1&mc_eid=6f67a838c9)