

# Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

---

Issue 11 *Winter 2014*

---

## Introduction: Realizing the Potential of Partnerships Between First-Year Faculty and Undergraduate Student Consultants

Alison Cook-Sather  
*Bryn Mawr College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe>



Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cook-Sather, Alison "Introduction: Realizing the Potential of Partnerships Between First-Year Faculty and Undergraduate Student Consultants," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education: Iss. 11 (2014)*, <http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss11/1>

## **INTRODUCTION: REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FIRST-YEAR FACULTY AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT CONSULTANTS**

*Alison Cook-Sather, Mary Katharine Woodworth Professor of Education and Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI)*

New faculty members face what can feel like an overwhelming set of challenges when they accept a position at a college or university. They must learn the campus culture, develop and teach new courses (sometimes their very first), get to know their students and colleagues as well as learn institutional expectations, maintain their research programs, and much more. Institutions of higher education have long recognized the need to support new faculty in this challenging transition (Fink, 1984; Sorcinelli, 1994), and in recent years, analyses of faculty development opportunities have stressed the necessity of such support in ensuring institutional quality as well as faculty success (Astin & Sorcinelli, 2013). While many of these considerations are framed in practical terms, it is also important to consider questions of relationship and identity that are at the heart of pedagogical engagement. Supporting first-year faculty, then, is not only about helping them learn to balance the multiple demands of a new context; it is also about creating opportunities through which they and the students with whom they work can engage deep philosophical and even ontological questions.

In acknowledgement not only of the need to prepare new professors for their responsibilities but also for the changing nature of those, Bok (2013) argues for affording faculty a reduced teaching load in their first year in exchange for a course that helps them prepare for their new role. Such preparation seems to be most fruitful if it is collaborative. There is growing evidence of the importance of collaboration among faculty members in professional development generally (Cowan & Westwood, 2006) and, in particular, in developing new pedagogical strategies (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2012). While most institutions provide information sessions and workshops for new faculty through their teaching and learning centers, provosts' or deans' offices, or department- or division-based programs, it is important to consider what kinds of deliberately collaborative opportunities for reflection and development new faculty might be offered. Learning communities (Cox & Richlin, 2004) are one forum within which such collaboration can unfold, and faculty-led seminars focused on teaching are emerging across contexts (e.g., Rudnitsky et al., 2013). Particularly relevant to *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* and to this issue of the journal in particular, there is increasing attention to the potential for faculty and students to collaborate in pedagogical planning, assessment, and research (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, 2012; Werder & Otis, 2010).

At Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, we offer many kinds of support to new faculty, but the Colleges' Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) takes a novel approach to preparing its newest members for their teaching and wider community responsibilities and supporting them, in particular, in exploring questions of relationship and identity. Since 2008, the Provosts' Offices at these two colleges have provided an opportunity through which new faculty members, when they accept positions at Bryn Mawr or Haverford, may elect to participate in a New Faculty Pedagogy Seminar in exchange for a reduced teaching load during their first year. The seminar includes weekly meetings of all faculty participants facilitated by me in my role as coordinator of

the TLI. Linked with the seminar is a one-on-one partnership between each faculty participant and an undergraduate student positioned as a pedagogical consultant through the TLI's Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program. These partnerships with student consultants are available for continuing faculty as well (Cook-Sather, 2013, 2011), but as the essays in this issue illustrate, they play a unique role for the newest members of the bi-college community.

All new faculty and student consultants receive guidelines for working in their partnerships meant to support but not constrain their collaboration (see Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, Appendix II for a version of the guidelines). Each consultant visits his or her faculty partner's class once per week, takes detailed observation notes focused on issues identified by the faculty member, and meets weekly with his or her faculty partner to discuss what is happening and what could be happening in that faculty member's classroom. Throughout the time that the faculty members and student consultants are in partnership, I meet weekly with the consultants to support them as they develop language, build confidence, and strengthen their capacity to work as pedagogical partners with faculty. As with all forms of support for new faculty, some partnerships with student consultants are more generative and productive than others, but the underlying premise of partnership informs everyone's experience in ways that shape subsequent thinking and practice.

This issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* features the reflections of six new faculty members who have taken up the opportunity to partner with student consultants in their first year and of five student consultants who have worked in partnership with these or other new faculty. Each of these contributors offers his or her own unique story and analysis of this experience, some focusing on the dynamics of the partnership, others focusing on the insights they gained into their own particular pedagogical commitments or key aspects of the teaching-learning relationship, and still others on the intersection of a number of these foci. While the theme of this issue is supporting new faculty in their first year of teaching, the student essays illuminate how this approach to faculty development is also enriching and empowering to the student consultants in the partnerships.

The essays in this issue and the experiences they recount at once complicate and clarify our thinking about both pedagogical partnerships and teaching and learning processes. The kind of deep analysis and deliberate practice reflected in the essays embody the underlying goals of the TLI. Neither promoting any particular pedagogical orthodoxy nor offering only nuts-and-bolts teaching strategies, this approach to the orientation of new faculty aims to support them in the development of their own unique sets of commitments and approaches — each developing his or her own identity as a teacher and ongoing learner.

The collection opens with Miriam Pallant's "[The Dynamics of Expertise](#)." This essay provides both an analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of student-faculty partnership as it is enacted through the SaLT program and an account of the experience of one experienced student consultant. Pallant offers an initial framing of the kind of complicating of faculty and student relationships supported by the SaLT program, illuminating the way that 'expertise' might be understood as a more complex and reciprocal dynamic than it is generally assumed to be. Two other essays offer illustrations of how such complicating plays out in both partnerships and classroom practice. In "[From Tennis to Teaching: The Power of Mentoring](#)," Anita Kurimay

complicates the notion of mentoring, often assumed to be a one-way process, as she analyzes her partnership with a student consultant and how the partnership itself and the issues she explored with her partner informed her pedagogical approaches. Focusing on some of the very concrete benefits of this unusual form of student-faculty relationship, Seung-Youn Oh emphasizes the importance of regular and ongoing dialogue with her consultant, the knowledge of college culture her consultant brings to the partnership, and the support provided to the consultants in their work in [“Learning to Navigate Quickly and Successfully: The Benefits of Working with a Student Consultant.”](#)

Several faculty members’ essays offer analyses of classroom dynamics and practices that illustrate how these faculty members became more self-aware and deliberate about structuring what happens in the spaces of learning they create. In [“The Weather in Hemingway,”](#) Lindsay V. Reckson proposes the notion of ‘productive disorder’ as a way, she explains, “of modeling the resistance to inherited forms and polyvocal playfulness of modernism itself” in her English literature classroom — a notion she came to through her ongoing dialogue with her student consultant. Making a similarly unconventional assertion, a new faculty member writes anonymously in [“Silence in the Classroom”](#) about the many possible meanings and generative power of silence that she clarified for herself through what started as a disagreement with her student consultant and emerged into an area of shared inquiry. Finally, Kathryn Adair Corbin describes an unusual approach she and her student consultant used to analyze and encourage active participation and the taking of responsibility for learning in her French language classroom in [“Get Out the Map: The Use of Participation Mapping in Planning and Assessment.”](#)

Across these essays, faculty and students alike highlight the ways in which they rethink key issues, such as order, silence, and participation, and also underlying premises, such as respect, the latter of which is the focus of as Leah Kahler’s [“Learning from Respect: Multiple Iterations of Respect in the Classroom.”](#) Several student consultants’ essays focus on revisions of the roles of student, learner, and teacher, as Emma Gulley does very explicitly in [“Letting Us All Be Learners.”](#) They also wrestle with how such rethinking intersects with their evolving values and identities. In [“Reciprocal Support and Shared Empowerment,”](#) Rosie McKinnes discusses the ways in which she and her faculty partner explored together a wide range of pedagogical and personal issues, including the particular challenges of teaching of writing and the larger value of a liberal arts education. And in [“Teaching and Learning as Learning To Be: Finding My Place and Voice as a Leader,”](#) Alexandra Wolkoff focuses on how she developed a collaboration relationship with her faculty partner that helped them both to work towards the fullest expression of their capabilities.

The collection of essays concludes with Sayres Rudy’s [“Consultancy, Disruption, and the Pulse of Pedagogy.”](#) Like Pallant’s opening reflection, Rudy’s essay offers a more philosophical framing of student-faculty partnerships, delving deeply into the notion of pedagogy at work through the SaLT program and presenting a detailed analysis of his own experience of that pedagogy. The form of Rudy’s piece reflects how the TLI can inspire a rigorous disciplinary treatment of the work of the Institute. Rudy argues that “successful pedagogy counsels us...by exploring productive disruptions of consciousness,” and he suggests that “the ‘consultancy’ feature” in the pedagogy of the TLI “exemplifies this promise by disrupting and provoking the consciousness of a professor.” Rudy’s intervention in this conversation suggests the ways that

the TLI has ramifications not only within the structures of academic disciplines but can inspire change across our institutions.

All of the essays reflect the qualities of successful partnerships that my colleagues and I have identified in our research into this approach to faculty development: respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). At the same time, they offer unique and various examples of what can happen when differently positioned teacher-learners — new faculty, accomplished in their fields but finding their way in a new context; seasoned students drawing on their experiences as learners and knowledgeable members of the college culture — come together in partnerships focused on explorations or pedagogical practice. They echo many of the benefits of and insights gained through partnership that other new faculty have described (e.g., Battat, 2012; Cull, 2013; Walker, 2012) and offer further evidence of the promise of partnership as a model for faculty development.

While all new faculty members and student consultants make and get something different from the partnerships in which they participate and have chosen individual aspects of their experiences upon which to focus in their essays, certain themes surface across most partnerships and essays. These themes include the benefit of regular and ongoing reflection through dialogue, the value of bringing different perspectives to bear on classroom practice, and the power and productivity of clarifying and communicating underlying pedagogical commitments. Some of these contributing authors' insights emerge from the agreement between faculty members' and consultants' perspectives, and some come from disagreement and difference. Both are generative and lead to the kind of clarification of values and approaches that facilitate faculty developing into the kind of teachers they hope to be. Such development is essential to the thriving of these individual faculty members and to the institutions in which they work.

## References

Austin, A. E., & Sorcinelli, M. D. (2013). The future of faculty development: Where are we going? *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 133, 85-97.

Battat, J. (2012). Facilitating quantum leaps: Reflections on how to promote active student learning in a physics classroom. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 6. Retrieved 5 January 2012 from <http://teachingandlearningtogether.blogs.brynmawr.edu/archived-issues/sixth-issue-spring-2012/facilitating-quantum-leaps-reflections-on-how-to-promote-active-student-learning-in-a-physics-classroom>

Bok, D. (2013). We must prepare Ph.D. students for the complicated art of teaching. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. November 11. Accessed 23 November 2013 from: <http://chronicle.com/article/We-Must-Prepare-PhD-Students/142893/>

Cook-Sather, A. (2013). Multiplying perspectives and improving practice: What can happen when undergraduate students collaborate with college faculty to explore teaching and learning. *Instructional Science*. DOI: 10.1007/s11251-013-9292-3

Cook-Sather, A. (2011). Teaching and learning together: College faculty and undergraduates co-create a professional development model. *To Improve the Academy*, 29, 219-232.

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cowan, J., & Westwood, J. (2006). Collaborative and reflective professional development: A pilot. *Active Learning in Higher Education: The Journal of the Institute for Learning and Teaching*, 7, 1, 63-71.

Cox, M. D., & Richlin, L. (Eds.) (2004). Building faculty learning communities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 97.

Cull, S. (2013). Practice, practice, practice: Building online tools to help students master skills. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 10. Retrieved 28 November 2013 from <http://teachingandlearningtogether.blogs.brynmawr.edu/tenth-issue-fall-2013/practice-practice-practice-building-online-tools-to-help-students-master-skills>

Eddy, P. L., & Garza Mitchell, R. L. (2012). Faculty as learners: Developing thinking communities. *Innovative Higher Education*, 37, 4, 283-296.

Fink, L. D. (1984). *The first year of college teaching*. (New directions for teaching and learning, No. 17). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Healey, M. (2012, October). "Students as producers and change agents." Plenary session presented at the Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Teaching and Learning. Ontario, Canada.

Rudnitsky, A., Ellis, G. W., DiBartolo, P. M., & Shea, K. M. (2013). Developing a faculty learning community grounded in the science of how people learn. In J. E. Groccia & L. Cruz (Eds.), *To Improve the Academy*, 32, 127-143.

Sorcinelli, M. D. (1994). Effective approaches to new faculty development. *Journal of Counseling & Development* 72, 5, 474-479.

Available at: [http://works.bepress.com/marydeane\\_sorcinelli/12](http://works.bepress.com/marydeane_sorcinelli/12)

Walker, A. (2012). The mid-semester challenge: Filtering the flow of student feedback. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 6. Retrieved 5 January 2012 from <http://teachingandlearningtogether.blogs.brynmawr.edu/archived-issues/sixth-issue-spring-2012/the-mid-semester-challenge-filtering-the-flow-of-student-feedback>

Werder, C., & Otis, M. M. (eds.) (2010). *Engaging student voices in the study of teaching and learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.