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Teaching Tips:

Training Teachers in Graduate Courses: A Graduate Student's Perspective

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Educating Future Educators

Graduate courses in adulthood and aging often focus on developing and expanding students' theoretical and empirical knowledge. After completing a single graduate course on adulthood and aging, the psychology graduate student is expected to have the knowledge base to create and deliver an undergraduate class. However, comprehension of adulthood and aging is not the only factor determining effective teaching. For instance, teacher effectiveness is often dependent on course-specific skills, resources, and engaging activities. Without course-specific development and teacher training, graduate students must apply the skills and resources they might or might not have gained from teaching introductory level psychology courses to the adulthood and aging course they teach. One must also take into account that the amount and quality of graduate training in teaching varies among graduate programs. For example, graduate training opportunities may or may not involve basic course development skills, such as syllabus creation and lecture design. Additionally, many graduate students' teaching experiences are limited to introductory undergraduate courses that offer little opportunity for course development or course development with limited supervision. Although general teaching skills are a useful resource, a more domain-specific approach to teaching is essential for effective delivery of adulthood and aging course material. For instance, teaching an entire course on adulthood and aging requires more course-specific resources and expertise than teaching a few aging lectures in an introductory human development course. How might members of Division 20 be certain that the future educators of adulthood and aging are effective? This is an important question, because many graduate and undergraduate psychology students may only take one aging course throughout their educational career.

If Division 20 is to (a) increase awareness of the psychology of adulthood and aging, (b) produce informed consumers, sponsors, and collaborators of research, (c) recruit top-quality graduate students, (d) and expand the adulthood and aging curriculum, the educators *themselves* must be knowledgeable, prepared, and effective in their course delivery. One innovative way to ensure productive teachers is to incorporate a teaching and course development module in graduate-level adulthood and aging courses. Thus, the

purpose of this article is to discuss the numerous benefits of integrating course and teaching development in graduate adulthood and aging classes.

Graduate Teaching Module

I had the fortunate opportunity to experience a course- specific teaching module my second year in graduate school while enrolled in West Virginia University's psychology of adulthood and aging class. The course included the same elements of most graduate courses (e.g., readings, discussion papers, grant proposal, exams, etc.). However, the course also incorporated an applied requirement; all graduate students were required to draw from class and outside readings and to create a 45 minute topical lecture to be delivered in an undergraduate adulthood and aging course. In addition, students created extensive lecture notes and applicable test items (multiple choice and short essay). Some example topics were theories of aging, gender, mental health, physical health, personality, intelligence, memory, sensory aging, and social support. Considering that graduate students must learn in-depth class content in core aging courses, there was limited time for the development of teaching. However, on the last day of class students provided a brief PowerPoint presentation of their created lecture. After each presentation, the instructor added comments and tips for future lecture delivery. One of the most useful aspects of the module was that every graduate student received a computer file containing about 15 different topical lectures. This teaching module did not require extensive in-class time and yet provided every graduate student a disk of lecture and exam materials to use as a prototype for future development of the student's own adulthood and aging courses.

Teaching Module Evaluation

I found the teaching module to serve a variety of important, simultaneous functions. First, graduate students emerged from the class with an almost fully prepared course on adulthood and aging, thus increasing their marketability and confidence in course delivery. Second, the class provided course-specific teaching development. Third, the assignment provided an opportunity for the instructor to offer valuable strategies for teaching adulthood and aging. Fourth, the teaching module required graduate students to learn course material via another mode; applying and reformatting gained knowledge in an undergraduate lecture. Fifth, creation of course lectures provided a format in which graduate students discussed and explored with one another perspectives on teaching adult development and aging. For example, the course in which I was enrolled incorporated students from three different graduate psychology programs: lifespan developmental, adult clinical, and counseling. Therefore, many of the approaches taken to designing the lectures were diverse due to the different graduate training backgrounds of the students.

Teaching Module Recommendations

Should the opportunity to teach a graduate-level course in adulthood and aging arise in the future, I would incorporate several ancillary components into the teaching module.

The first supplement would be dependent on class size and availability of concurrent adulthood and aging undergraduate courses, whereby the graduate student could actually deliver their topical lecture to an undergraduate class. In this setting, the instructor would evaluate and provide useful, individualized feedback. Second, following my own teaching philosophy, learning occurs through methods other than lectures, such as class participation via immersion in interactive class activities, class discussions, and a multitude of real-world examples. Although many graduate students in my class incorporated these elements, it could be added as an evaluative requirement for the module. Third, handouts and references regarding teaching an adulthood and aging class, such as the resources provided by Division 20 would be a useful tool for students.

On a broader note, not only does this graduate teaching module apply to Division 20, but across all sub- disciplines of psychology. However, this proposed module is particularly relevant to the field of adulthood and aging as many students enter careers where the potential for interacting with older adults is substantial and student knowledge of adulthood and aging is often based on one or a few courses. Therefore, it is imperative that adulthood and aging courses are effective. Additionally, gaining the attention of undergraduate students in an adulthood and aging course may potentially stimulate interest and entrance into the field, thereby enhancing the need to expand the undergraduate and graduate adulthood and aging curriculum. On an individual note, I have left my own comprehensive graduate course feeling prepared, confident, and energized to continue my own education and that of others in adulthood and aging.

Resources

APA Division 20: Adulthood development and aging. (2003). *Resources for educators*. Retrieved February 14, 2003, from <http://aging.ufl.edu/apadiv20.htm>

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