

**From Apprentice to Professional:  
Community College Teacher Training**

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Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) is a Master's Colleges and Universities I public institution in Nacogdoches, Texas, a community of 30,000 located in east-central Texas. SFA enrolls approximately 10,000 students, over 95% of whom are residents of Texas. Of the 1,500 graduate students and 8,500 undergraduate students attending SFA, 81% are White/Non-Hispanic, 12% are African American, 5% are Hispanic, 1% is American Indian, and 1% is Asian/Pacific Islander.

The literature on preparing new teachers of psychology, although replete with practical suggestions for effective training, reflects significant variability in the preparation that new teachers receive (e.g., Buskist, Tears, Davis, & Rodrigue, 2002; Meyers & Prieto, 2000a, 2000b; Prieto, 2003). In response, Davis and Huss (2002) proposed that "ideal" training programs should include the following: (a) orientation to the department and university, (b) a teaching of psychology course, (c) frequent meetings with a supervisor, (d) means for becoming entrenched in the teaching community, (e) development of a teaching portfolio, and (f) evaluation. Below I describe community college teacher training at SFA and how our program contains these ideal elements.

Community College Teacher Training

The primary goals of SFA's Master of Arts degree in the Teaching of Psychology are to help students "gain employment as...faculty member[s] at...a community college" as well as to "prepare students for additional graduate work" (SFA Graduate Bulletin, 2004-2006, p. 211-212). Regardless of whether students choose to pursue employment at a community college or doctoral education, training effective teachers is the focus of the program.

### *Psychological Knowledge Coursework*

Students in the teaching track take a series of courses consisting of Psychological Statistics, Experimental Design, Ethics, and a minimum of two other topics courses (e.g., Learning, Personality) designed to provide a broad-based knowledge of psychology, a necessity when teaching undergraduate classes. This training is especially important at the community college level where teachers are often responsible for a diverse array of courses. In addition, because new teachers at community colleges often teach Introductory Psychology, which typically covers the gamut of psychological topics, students must take a two-semester sequence consisting of Advanced General Psychology and Advanced Applied Psychology. Advanced General Psychology covers sensation and perception, learning and memory, development, and social psychology in considerable detail. Advanced Applied Psychology provides additional coursework on personality, abnormal psychology, adjustment, and clinical psychology.

Students in the teaching track also complete an 18 hr minor (typically six courses) in a discipline of their choice. Although students have the option of choosing any discipline, we urge them to select one that complements psychology and increases their marketability. For this reason, many of our students choose to minor in sociology.

### *Pedagogical Knowledge Coursework*

The core of the teaching track consists of three interrelated courses and a teaching-related research project. Below I describe in more detail the pedagogical knowledge coursework that students in the teaching track complete on the way to obtaining their degrees.

*Teaching seminar.* The first course, Teaching Seminar, exposes students to the primary issues central to effective college and university teaching such as course preparation, student-teacher rapport, facilitating student learning, classroom management, test construction, evaluating student learning, and ethics in teaching. Readings come from McKeachie's (2002) *Teaching Tips* and a variety of other sources (e.g., Davis & Buskist, 2002; *Teaching of Psychology*).

During the semester, students write two drafts of their personal teaching philosophy and discuss the merits of using their teaching philosophy as a guide for constructing their own courses. In addition, they define the contents of their teaching portfolio (Davis & Huss, 2002; Korn, 2002).

Students also give three 20 min “mini-lectures,” each of which is critiqued by their classmates and videotaped for later evaluation (Buskist et al., 2002; Davis & Huss, 2002). Students are responsible for choosing the content of the lectures, and subsequently use the information to prepare a 1 hr “guest” lecture for a section of Introductory Psychology.

In addition to these “active” learning assignments, students also write a short paper on a teaching-related topic (e.g., characteristics of master teachers). Although Buskist et al. (2002) found that such writing assignments are often absent from teaching of psychology courses, “the inclusion of such assignments...assists [students] in clarifying their thinking about teaching” (Davis & Huss, 2002, p. 144).

Finally, to promote familiarity with the resources available to new psychology teachers and other important issues from the field, students join the PsychTeacher™ electronic discussion list <<http://teachpsych.lemoyne.edu/teachpsych/div/psychteacher.html>>, a moderated discussion list sponsored by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division 2 of the American Psychological Association). This outlet facilitates discussion of teaching-related issues with other members of the teaching community (Davis & Huss, 2002).

*Advising and technology.* The second course, Advising and Technology, exposes students to a variety of issues related to advising undergraduates (e.g., timely progression toward graduation, possible career choices, providing support to discontented students, ethical considerations). Regardless of whether community college students subsequently attend 4-year colleges and universities or seek full-time employment (Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003), quality advising is critical for helping students make important educational and career decisions (Appleby, 2002).

In addition, because community colleges are offering more online and distance education courses, it is important for students to learn how to use different course management systems (e.g., Blackboard, WebCT), construct course-related Web pages, and in general ascertain how to teach in a distance education environment. Students discuss related topics such as the benefits and difficulties of teaching online (e.g., Finley, 2004) and how they can use their teaching philosophies as a guide to constructing better online courses. Buskist et al. (2002) recommended that teaching of psychology courses should “include content related to the use of electronic technologies” (p. 142). Similarly, our faculty believe that possessing such skills will increase students’ marketability for community college positions.

*Teaching practicum.* In the third course, Teaching Practicum, “students [are] solely responsible for preparation and instruction of a freshman level course” (SFA Graduate Bulletin, 2004-2006, p. 219). During the semester, students teach their own introductory course, meeting frequently with a faculty advisor to discuss problems, course content, exam construction, and other teaching issues (Davis & Huss, 2002). This experience allows them to apply what they have learned in previous courses, increases their confidence, and prepares them for future classroom endeavors (Prieto & Meyers, 1999).

*Teaching project.* Students must also complete either a teaching-related thesis (for students wishing to pursue doctoral education) or a non-thesis teaching project. These projects give students the opportunity to study different teaching topics systematically and become more familiar with some of the “non-classroom” activities that that define scholarship in the teaching of psychology (e.g., Halpern et al., 1998).

### Conclusion

Clearly, the training of effective teachers is important in that it sustains and expands the discipline of psychology. Although training effective teachers can be a challenging endeavor, I agree with Davis and Huss (2002) who stated, “the implementation and support of such a program may necessitate a significant commitment to teaching, [but] it is likely to lead to greater rewards in terms of the quality of [teacher] training and the education of

undergraduate students” (p. 149). By completing SFA’s Master of Arts program in the Teaching of Psychology, which includes Davis and Huss’s (2002) ideal teacher training components, our graduates are prepared to contribute in important ways to the sustenance and expansion of our ever-evolving discipline.

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