Synergies of Team Teaching Working Group
Topic: Motivation and Purposeful Work: Finding Your Passion
Summer 2023

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I.   Overview

We began thinking about this working group as a way to bring together faculty from across divisions and disciplines for building interdisciplinary, team-teaching possibilities. There is a lot of interest on our campuses among faculty to teach collaboratively with their colleagues, but it is challenging to create opportunities for team teaching structurally. Therefore, we decided to work with faculty on designing or revising team-taught syllabi, while addressing with administrators how we might invest in and support team teaching at ACS institutions.

Our overall goals for this working group were as follows:

- Faculty participants will learn about the major models of team teaching and hone pedagogical skills for team teaching across disciplines and divisions.
- Faculty participants will workshop syllabi with colleagues from across ACS schools to create new or revised team-taught courses.
- Administrator participants will learn how to create structures conducive to team teaching at their home institutions at a time of budget constraints and concerns about enrollment.

Literature Review

A review of the scholarship on team teaching suggests the following: a) students and faculty both benefit from team-taught courses, b) team-taught courses require specific investments of time (for faculty) and resources (for the institution), and c) team teaching may be an ideal solution for developing vibrant faculty networks across divisions, especially as faculty emerge from the pandemic and seek new ways to teach creatively and collaboratively.

Research has consistently shown that team teaching benefits students and faculty alike. Ronika Rooks et al point out that students gain from learning about multiple disciplinary perspectives, and faculty "benefit from conversations about their teaching strengths and weaknesses, while modeling effective collaboration for students." More importantly, Nancy Bacharach et al suggest that team teaching offers "an energizing opportunity for faculty to renew their passion for their profession." This is because team teaching is an enriching experience; faculty find that

collaborating with colleagues on planning and teaching encourages pedagogical innovation as well as productive reflection. During our first session, our working group discussed Rachel Goshgarian and Neha Vohra's "Team-Teaching as Feminist Praxis at a Small Liberal Arts College," thinking about what it takes to bridge two (or more) disciplines in a single course and what it means to design a syllabus or assignments or course policies together.

During our second session, we discussed the specific challenges of team teaching, using Kathryn M. Plank's "Team Teaching" as a starting point. Though energizing, team teaching can also be demanding in multiple ways. It requires significant investments of time and energy to "work with another person to coordinate your teaching, integrate your plans, discuss how you will assess student work, and so forth. Otherwise, team teaching can result in confusion and tension among students and between instructors." Moreover, it expects faculty to justify their differences as well as provide a united front for students.

II.   Faculty Reflections on Team Teaching

Faculty participants in this working group worked on either designing or revising team-taught syllabi. Here are their reflections on what it means to collaborate with colleagues on teaching.

- **Valerie Renegar:** Over the course of thinking, reading, and discussing a wide variety of materials and perspectives in regard to team teaching, I am struck by how many choices there are when it comes to team teaching. There is no correct way to do it, and some approaches work better for particular faculty, courses, and disciplines. There are, however, a number of themes that cut across these myriad approaches, the most notable of which is a spirit of collaboration. The most successful team-teaching models are a product of robust collaboration between faculty. Team teaching offers faculty a unique opportunity to create a course that is greater than the sum of the parts contributing to it as long as both, or all, faculty approach the process with a spirit of collaboration where everyone's contributions are valued. Faculty can begin collaborating on a course beginning with its inception, then continue through the course proposal process, syllabi building, delivery, and grading. This kind of robust collaboration allows both students and faculty to benefit from multiple perspectives, and the best of what team teaching has to offer.
- **Fay Guarraci:** From my experiences in the past and from participating in this ACS summer working group, I have learned much about team teaching. Here are some helpful tips and reasons to try team teaching for anyone considering proposing a new team-taught course:
  - Start early: It takes longer than you think to hash out the details, plan assignments, and make a schedule. This is all in addition to figuring out what course you are going to teach and what material you are going to cover.
  - Be prepared: Team teaching will likely take a lot more time than teaching alone. The preparation will take longer. The grading will take longer. You will likely have extra meetings throughout the semester. This is often in addition to attending all of the class meetings. Not every team-taught class is arranged this way. There are many ways to team teach. But rarely is team-teaching a time saver.
  - Two heads are better than one: You will often find better ways to solve problems, deal with student issues, develop assignments, and modify the class for the future etc., when you are brainstorming with a partner.

- o Make a plan for grading: Let the students know who will be grading which assignments. Make it clear who the students should go to for guidance, advice, or concerns when they have questions. This will relieve their stress of having two professors. I have found going over graded assignments as a team before they are turned back helps to make sure we are on the same page if the grading was divided (for consistency across students). Grading everything together is time consuming but guarantees consistency, which may not be possible for all assignments but may be a good idea for large final assignments. Whatever you decide, make it clear to the students and be consistent.
- o Explain to the students the benefit of team-teaching: Incorporate this information into the syllabus as well as into the first day of class. Remind the students throughout the class how you are bringing your different perspectives to the discussion.
- o Make room for your peer, let your colleague shine: Give them a chance to be an expert, and try not to interrupt. We are accustomed to being in charge in the classroom and it is hard to take a backseat. But make sure you take a backseat when your colleague is guiding discussion, lecturing, or answering questions. Be a supportive listener. Wait to be cued in before you jump in. Of course, some discussions are more dynamic and are designed to be back and forth discussions and that is ok too.
- o Be aware of power dynamics: You may not be at the same rank as your colleague. You may hold positions of authority serving on university committees (e.g., Tenure and Promotion Committee, Awards Committee). These are not reasons to avoid team teaching with a colleague, but you should be sensitive to these dynamics as you engage and interact. There could be benefits and there could be risks that you may want to consider and protect yourself from in terms of future opportunities.
- o Have fun and enjoy learning from your colleague!
- **Katie Shester and Andrea LePage:** Working from the distinct fields of economics and art history, we collaborated to develop a syllabus for a course entitled *The Bracero Program, 1942-1964: Labor, Immigration, Art, and Economics*. The experience taught us a lot about course design, from selecting the right collaborator, to pitching the course to the university, to developing a course that incorporates both our disciplines in meaningful ways.

    Selecting the right collaborator was an essential component of our process. Before joining the Synergies of Team-Teaching Working Group, we spent two years co-chairing the General Education Development Committee at W&L. During that time, we learned a lot about one another's strengths, individual presentation styles, and the ways we could combine our individual strengths to create a team that was more effective than its constituent parts. In essence, we learned to trust one another, something that we believe will translate to the classroom setting and is a critical component for effective team-teaching.

    We conceived *The Bracero Program, 1942-1964: Labor, Immigration, Art, and Economics* as an undergraduate lecture/discussion class that would be taught during W&L's intensive spring term, a four-week-long experience in which students take only one course and faculty teach only one course. During our workgroup sessions, we discussed the financial realities of team-teaching (two faculty paid to teach a single course) and selected the spring term with that reality in mind. W&L markets its spring term as a time for innovative teaching and learning and curricular exploration; we predicted that the university would be more likely to

approve a team-taught course during the four-week intensive term than during the full terms when there is more pressure to teach courses required for the major.

Some of the most important feedback we got from the group encouraged us to think about incorporating both of our disciplines into the course design in meaningful ways that would clearly articulate to students the value of taking the course with an economist and an art historian, rather than with just one or the other. We began our design process by describing how we would teach the course from our unique disciplinary angles and identified the points of intersection. We found that our approach to the material was not terribly different, though our examples were. Through our discussions, it became clear that art examples could add a layer of empathy and understanding to the material, and data analysis could help students to better understand the relationship between culture and economic outcomes. We brought different knowledge sets to the material, and it was exciting that even at that early moment, we found ourselves teaching one another. We determined that we would co-lead each session (while embedding short discipline-specific lectures into the course), rather than alternate leadership on different days. We discussed the value of students participating in a course in which faculty (who they might sometimes imagine as all-knowing) oscillated between the roles of teacher and student. We incorporated assignments into the course that would place students in the role of teacher. The syllabus design process encouraged deep pedagogical discussions that left us feeling invigorated about our teaching.

III.   Further Considerations for ACS Institutions

Beyond the specific challenges encountered by faculty, our working group met with administrators at Washington and Lee University, Southwestern University, and Rhodes College to discuss specific administrative concerns that need to be considered in order to robustly and productively support team teaching at ACS institutions. What is offered here is a series of recommendations for administrators if they would like to build team-teaching apparatuses at their institutions.

Implications for Faculty Development

- There should be guidelines for what types of courses can be team taught and whether any two faculty members can request (within the same department or discipline) team-teaching assignments.
- There should also be parameters for what constitutes team teaching: is it any kind of collaboration? Or does the planning and delivery of the course have to be divided evenly? Do both instructors have to attend each class? Do they have to grade together or separately?
- Teaching partners may be peers, but one may be more experienced than the other. Team teaching can provide opportunities for mentoring, but guidelines should be provided for how that mentoring relationship would work.
- Guidelines would also be needed in case one teaching partner could serve as an evaluator for another's next review. If so, what role do the observations play in that evaluation?

- It is possible that team teaching for a particular partnership does not go smoothly. Administrators need to create spaces where disputes between teaching partners can be aired and resolved effectively.

Budgetary Implications
Team-taught courses are more costly than single-taught ones. Internal grants or endowment funds are currently used at some ACS schools to fund team-taught courses. For instance, Southwestern's Paideia program draws from an endowment. The endowment covers a faculty stipend to attend workshops to develop a team-taught course. Either a faculty member can teach an overload and receive the stipend, or they can use the stipend to pay for an adjunct. The endowment covers about four team-taught courses per year. At Rhodes, an internal grant to support course innovation is sometimes given out to faculty based on a competitive application process to buy out a course. At W&L, there are no internal or endowment funds for team-teaching; if there were funds available, pay for overload and adjunct courses is high, making it hard to buy out a course. To team teach, W&L faculty need to draw twice the normal minimum class size. As W&L is moving into new general education implementation, a case could be made that some of the funding set aside for that work should go toward facilitation of team-teaching.

External Funding Options
Given the benefits of team-teaching for faculty development as well as for student growth and support (especially for URM students), it seems beneficial to apply for grant funding to support development of team-teaching at ACS schools. The grant funding should require workshops about models of team-teaching, and details should be determined ahead of time regarding classroom time, weekly meetings between co-teachers, grading policies, and course design. In other words, built into the grant funding would be requirements for syllabus design and use of classroom time, all following best practices. (Dividing up course content, for instance, would not be allowed because it is not as beneficial as having both faculty in the class at once responding to the content together.) Potential organizations to apply to might be the Mellon Foundation, the Teagle Foundation, and the NEH Connections program. Alternatively or additionally, some funding might be sought for consortial minors, enabling team-teaching from across institutions. But this would require agreements among institutions for the use of online teaching. (Presently, remote teaching is not an option at some member ACS schools.)

IV.   **Syllabi**
- New syllabus co-designed for Washington and Lee University: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964: Labor, Immigration, Art, and Economics
- Revised syllabus for Southwestern University: Explorations in Neuroscience
- Revised syllabus for Southwestern University: Women, Math, and Popular Culture
- Revised syllabus for Southwestern University's Paideia Seminar: Investigating Identity

V.   **Bibliography**

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