

Five Reasons Why We Should Prepare Graduate Students to Teach

(Adapted, with permission, from "A Dozen Reasons Why We Should Prepare Graduate Students to Teach," by Marilla Svinicki, The University of Texas at Austin.)

1. **Building self-confidence.** Many graduate students are assigned as teaching assistants as a way of financing their graduate studies. They are placed in the difficult position of having to guide the learning of individuals or groups of undergraduates through content that they have often not completely mastered themselves. They approach this responsibility with a great deal of trepidation about their abilities. With some support and training, we can increase the probability that the teaching experience will be a good one, one from which they will learn a great deal and which will actually boost their self-confidence instead of destroying it.
2. **Improving efficiency.** Teaching can be a very time-consuming activity when a person is new to the task. The second most common fear of graduate teaching assistants is whether they will be able to balance the demands of their teaching responsibilities with the demands of their own work as students. A little time spent in learning the basics of teaching and how to manage it can make them much more efficient at the task, thus leaving them more time to work on their research.
3. **Teaching as a set of transferable skills.** The skills which graduate students learn as teaching assistants or in an organized program on teaching will stand them in good stead regardless of their future careers. This is obvious in the case of students who wish to enter the academic world as faculty, but there is as much if not more instruction occurring in business and industry as there is in education. Professionals who have had teaching experience will be able to translate the skills they learned as teachers into the skills of professional presentations, management, evaluation of employees, organizing and supervising work and many other areas. Their training in teaching can even translate directly into the kind of training and development which is becoming such a large part of the private sector.
4. **Gaining the edge in the job search.** Students who are able to show that they have had some training in teaching during their graduate years will be more competitive in the job searches. All job candidates will have been trained in the discipline; so our graduates will have to demonstrate additional skills to give them the edge over graduates from other comparable programs. Training in the skills of teaching could be just the edge they need.
5. **Commitment to teaching excellence.** The university is committed to excellence in teaching wherever and whenever teaching occurs. It is only right, therefore, that students should be offered the opportunity to begin to learn the skills of teaching or enhance those skills they already possess.