LSA Teaching Academy

THE POWER

Leading the Way in University Teaching
A transition is underway in higher education: as state and federal subsidies for colleges and universities dwindle to small fractions of total budgets, tuition dollars fund an ever-greater share of these institutions’ operating costs. And this means that faculty members at these institutions can no longer afford to focus solely on research at the expense of teaching. While institutions of all profiles have always included faculty members who care deeply about students and seek to be the best teachers they can be, the time has come for colleges and universities, especially the large research universities that have so long been notorious for neglecting student learning, to build a broad-based institutional culture and resource base that supports quality teaching and learning across disciplines.

The University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) is in the midst of piloting an array of programs, collectively known as the LSA Teaching Academy, for improving teaching and learning in precisely this way. The Teaching Academy provides a range of faculty support, including seminars offering basic pedagogical training for new faculty members, opportunities for more advanced faculty members to learn and
discuss ways to enrich their students’ experiences, and a rich set of financial and personnel resources for helping faculty to better leverage technological tools in the classroom and more effectively teach exceptionally large lecture courses.

LSA has 19,755 students and roughly 1,200 faculty members, and the Teaching Academy seeks to be nothing less than a national leader in driving an improved culture of teaching at large research universities—a highly replicable model for transforming pedagogy and attitudes toward teaching, at scale. We hope to demonstrate that with a few-year investment in pedagogical resources and staff support, all instructors can improve: everyone from those dedicated instructors who are already excellent teachers, to those who need to see the effort required for good teaching as valued and properly incentivized.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The Teaching Academy consists of several components: the New Faculty Teaching Seminar; the Large Course Initiative (LCI) on pedagogical best practices for courses with several hundred students; a group dedicated to teaching with technology called BlueCorps; a grant program for teaching with technology through the LSA Instructional Technology Committee; and a set of May Seminars on teaching. The impact of these programs is felt everywhere—in all departments and at all levels of experience and comfort with teaching—and students and faculty benefit alike. A more detailed description of each program follows.

In partnership with the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching—the first university teaching center in the country—LSA introduced the LSA New Faculty Teaching Seminar for incoming first-year faculty members in 2009. Other components of the Teaching Academy encourage our entire faculty, not just the new members, toward better teaching. The initial outcomes of the Large Course Initiative (LCI) are promising, and the College is thrilled by the level of engagement demonstrated by the 18 LSA faculty members who participated this past winter in the program’s first session.

With 15 to 18 LCI participants per year and typical large-class sizes well into the hundreds, we expect the LCI to impact several thousand students per year.

Another faculty learning community, to be launched in the 2013-14 academic year, is the LSA BlueCorps, which strives to bridge the technology gap that continues to grow between our faculty and our undergraduates and to provide support to faculty members who are interested in improving their skills and strategies for teaching with technology. We expect this program to have a lifetime of some five to six years, ideally with eight BlueCorps members per year. Averaging five faculty members per BlueCorps member, we can expect over 200 faculty members to gain significant skill in the realm of teaching with technology during the lifetime of the program. The impact will be felt even more broadly as technological innovations diffuse among the rest of our faculty. LSA’s emphasis on leveraging technology to improve pedagogy is also expressed through a broad grant program within the LSA Instructional Technology Committee, which has several sources of funding for high-impact innovations in teaching with technology.

Finally, we are developing a new set of May Seminars on Integrative Themes in the Liberal Arts, which will further drive the focus on teaching across the college.

THE IMPACT

What would it look like if 50 percent of LSA faculty taught 20 percent better? Or if 90 percent of our faculty taught 50 percent better? Gifts for an expanded Teaching Academy Program—one that aimed to touch every faculty member over the next several years—could place Michigan at the center of the discussion of faculty training and retraining, particularly around the hybrid and mixed forms of on and off-line teaching likely to dominate that conversation—while also offering support for older but equally valuable strategies, including the small seminar, the super-charismatic lecture, and the lab or research mentorship.
LSA Teaching Academy
$5M endowed to Name

LSA is actively seeking financial support to endow the Teaching Academy. The goal is for the Teaching Academy to influence the entire faculty, creating a culture dedicated to exploring pedagogical innovations, spreading best practices, and valuing teaching excellence. Given the scale of the College, these are hugely ambitious goals. Encouraged by the results we have already seen from the New Faculty Teaching Seminar, however, we believe the goals to be attainable. Given the funding necessary to run, refine, and evaluate the programs, we anticipate that the Teaching Academy is a highly replicable model for driving the institutional and cultural changes necessary for the faculty of a research university to provide a quality learning experience to every undergraduate.

Your Named Endowment supports a range of initiatives to insure and support the highest excellence in teaching among all top tier research universities. This $5M gift will guarantee the best active teaching faculty in the world.

■ New Faculty Teaching Seminar
$60,000 annually

The seminar provides a systematic introduction to teaching at Michigan, helping new instructors identify who their students are, what they need, how to balance lectures and activities, how their teaching will be evaluated, and where to go for help in improving their teaching. The very fact that all new LSA faculty are required to attend the seminar, and compensated for their attendance, makes a powerful statement about how much LSA values teaching, and gives seminar participants a sense of the importance of teaching at Michigan. Since 2009, the results have been significant; the evaluation scores of faculty who have gone through the seminar have improved in all categories on which LSA courses and instructors are assessed. For each instructor in whom we invest, over 200 students are impacted in a three-year period.

■ LSA Large Course Initiative
$40,000 annually

LSA Large Course Initiative (LCI) has faculty participants meet monthly to explore how lessons from the scholarship of teaching and learning can enhance courses with 75 or more students. In addition to reading the scholarly literature on teaching large courses, LCI participants mutually visit and evaluate one another’s classrooms and hear from guest speakers who have revamped their own large courses.

■ BlueCorps Technology Innovation
$100,000 to $200,000 annually

The LSA BlueCorps will be comprised of a group of recent LSA graduates who will be assigned to work with a small number of faculty members to help identify and apply the most appropriate and effective technology resources to integrate into their courses. The BlueCorps has two expected outcomes. First, it will increase faculty competence and confidence in the use of higher-level technology in curriculum development and the classroom experience. Second, it will provide greater depth of expertise and focus to the cohort of BlueCorps members who will commit to a 12 to18 month experience, and allow them to develop their liberal-arts skills for a variety of post-graduation careers.

■ Integrative Themes in the Liberal Arts Annual Seminar
$75,000 annually

Three seminars will run for interested faculty members, each one exploring how a given theme can be integrated into courses across the LSA curriculum. One will explore how sustainability can be addressed across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, to encourage the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills with respect to sustainability as it appears in a wide variety of domains from philosophy to psychology to mathematics. Another seminar will pursue similar goals with respect to music and the arts, examining how these might appear in a broad assortment of LSA courses (such as the Physics Department’s Physics of Music course). A final seminar on “Teaching the New Diversity” will examine how instructors can implement pedagogical innovations in ways that improve the educational experience of each and every student in their classrooms, with an awareness of socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and family experience attending college.

WAYS TO FUND YOUR GIFT

Your gifts of cash, pledges, or appreciated securities change lives. Wills, estate, and planned gifts allow you to create a lasting legacy that will enable the best and brightest minds to experience a liberal arts education, solve problems in a changing world, and yield ideas and innovations that will make a difference in Michigan and around the globe.

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