

Future Faculty Focus



The History of Preparing Future Faculty Program

The Preparing Future Faculty Program at VCU offers a series of short courses and professional development opportunities for graduate students interested in pursuing careers in higher educa-

ate students to the roles and responsibilities of higher education and addresses teaching and learning issues in the college classroom.

the [Division of Community Engagement](#) while providing networking opportunities with students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines, as well as discipline-specific areas of study.

About the pro-



Since most courses are one or two credits, students are able to easily add them into their academic program schedules. For students who complete all course requirements, the capstone course is an internship/externship experience during which the student is mentored by a senior faculty member.

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tion.. The series is modeled on the national Preparing Future Faculty Program created by the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](#). It introduces gradu-

gram

The program offers access to resources and activities in the [Academic Learning Transformation Lab](#) and service-learning experiences through

PFF Courses Descriptions

GRAD 601 The Academic Profession (Fall) 2 credits. Designed to introduce graduate students to the roles and responsibilities of faculty members in institutions of higher education **GRAD 602 Teaching, Learning and Technology in Higher Education** (Spring) 2 credits Prerequisite: GRAD 601. This course focuses on the art and science of

teaching and learning, and how to evaluate, select and use instructional technology in ways that support learning and professional development **OVPR 603 Responsible Conduct of Research** (fall) 1 credit. **GRAD 605 Professional Specialty Seminar** 1 credit, Prerequisites: GRAD 601, GRAD 602. Registration by permission of the program. Email pffprogram@vcu.edu to request enrollment. **GRAD 606**

Internship/Externship in Professional Teaching Intern course, three credits, offered in fall, spring and summer semesters. Prerequisites: GRAD 601, GRAD 602, OVPR 603 and GRAD 605

PFF Program Alumni Spotlight



"I learned the 'ins' and 'outs' of what it means to be a professor ... and how to effectively execute teaching [strategies] in the classroom"

Teshell K. Greene took the PFF certification as a teaching and research postdoctoral fellow in the Institutional Research and Academic Career Development (IRACDA) program at VCU. She is currently working as a Biology Lecturer at the University of Richmond.

What does the PFF program mean to you?

The first mention of the VCU PFF program was through my teaching and research fellowship at VCU. The curriculum of courses was a requirement for my teaching responsibilities in the IRACDA program. Now that I have gone through the program, I think of the PFF program as a place of valuable influence and growth for interested in teaching, especially those who have not had any formal training as such.

How did your experience in the PFF Program enhance your understanding of what it means to be faculty and impact your plans for a career in academia?

I learned the "ins" and "outs" of what it means to be a professor (tenure, non-tenure, visiting, term, etc.), research, teaching and service expectations and how to effectively execute teaching in the classroom. In the GRAD 602 course I was exposed to the culture of active learning strategies for enhanced student learning, ways to effectively execute and engage students with the material presented, and also how to properly access for their learning comprehension. After incorporating these strategies into a semester long biology course, the PFF program continues to encour-

age the way I structure and teach my classes.

How did experiences with the PFF Program and receipt of the PFF Program Certificate of Achievement give you an "edge" in your career?

I found that unlike my coworkers hired at the same time as myself that I am the only one who has completed a PFF certification program. As we prepare for the upcoming semester, I can already tell that I have an edge over the ones who are new faculty since I've had training in teaching related activities such as syllabus development, active learning incorporation into the classroom and how to use Blackboard. Moreover, I am more inclined and aggressive at exercising active learning strategies in my classes when compared to those who have not been exposed to such pedagogical approaches.

Tell us a little bit about your internship/externship experience and share with us the impact that the project and mentoring relationship had on you.

I taught a semester long introductory biology course of 50 students at Virginia State University during the Spring 2014 semester. I had a wonderful teaching mentor who understood and supported the importance of active learning to encourage independent student learning. Prior to the start of the semester we worked together to execute the components of a blended learning class and hit the ground running once the semester started. My mentor visited my class on several occasions to assess

my teaching and allowed me to sit in on several faculty administrative meetings. This externship experience provided a definite answer as to the kind of academic career that I wanted to pursue and how I would go about doing so.

What is the most crucial piece (or pieces) of advice that you would give students currently enrolled in the PFF Program coursework.

Take advantage of the GRAD 605 course that encourages the development of materials needed for a teaching portfolio. The feedback from the faculty members if beneficial and will be helpful when preparing your teaching portfolio for your GRAD 606 externship/internship and hiring package for the job search process. In addition, if you do teach a course during your internship/externship, do not hesitate to exercise what you learn in the PFF program. This is the "one" time you will have to test the waters before embarking on a full time faculty position.

Tomorrow's Professor eNewsletter; An excerpt from Stanford's Teaching and Learning by Rick Reis: The Nature of Self-Directed Learning

In this section of the chapter we review self-directed learning from three perspectives. First are definitions of SDL that frame it both as a method of organizing instruction and as a personal attribute; second, we review the goals of SDL ranging from gaining new knowledge to inspiring social action and change. Finally, examining some of the myths of SDL will help to further clarify what this type of learning is all about. SDL which has been researched, theorized, and practiced for over 50 years (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, 2012; Candy, 1991; Houle, 1961; Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1967, 1971, 1978) has been described both as a personal attribute (that is, a person can be very self-directed and autonomous in their learning), or as a process (that is, a way of organizing instruction). SDL as a personal attribute refers to an individual predisposition toward this type of learning, and comfort with autonomy in the learning process. SDL as a process is an approach to learning that is controlled by the learner. Knowles is well-known for his definition of

the process of SDL "in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (1975, p. 18). Knowles (1975) also delineated a six-step process which could form the basis of a learning contract for learners and instructors to follow in planning self-directed learning. The six steps are: 1) climate setting, that is, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support; (2) diagnosing learning needs; (3) formulating learning goals; (4) identifying human and material resources for learning; (5) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies; and (6) evaluating learning outcomes. Tough (1978) studied SDL from the perspective of learning projects which he defined as deliberate efforts to build knowledge, develop skills or make changes, efforts that took a minimum of seven hours. He also outlined a

process similar to that of Knowles. Learners move through a series of steps that have to do with first deciding what to learn, then what resources they need (time? money? materials?), where to learn, and how to maintain the motivation for learning. The steps also involve setting goals and timetables, or protest corporate exploitation.

Myths of SDL

Though adults have always continued to learn, it wasn't until the late 1960s that adult educators and researchers began systematically attending to adult learning. Andragogy (see Chapter 3) and self-directed learning were the two earliest and most robust conceptualizations of the nature and characteristics of adult learning. While andragogy identified assumptions or characteristics of adult learners, self-directed learning is more about the process involved when adults engage in their own learning. SDL immediately resonated with adult ,



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educators and researchers, producing a burgeoning body of writings, publications and applications. Along with the growing body of research and writing a number of misconceptions or, as Brockett (1994) calls them, myths of SDL evolved which sometimes cloud new learners' understanding of this type of learning. We thought it would be helpful to look at these myths and their refutation by Brockett. Six of the myths relate to the learners themselves and their activities. Myth 1, SDL is an all-or-nothing concept, is the mistaken notion that you are either a self-directed learner or you are not. In reality, every learner is different, possessing varying levels of self-directedness. It is more accurate to view SDL as a continuum, "a characteristic that exists, to a greater or lesser degree, in all persons and in all learning situations" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 11). Myth 2, Self-direction implies learning in isolation, is an incorrect stereotype that places the learner in seclusion from other learners. Although learners may engage in periods of intense, individualized learning, their learning will be enhanced by sharing it with others and inquiring with other adults or instructors about their questions, insights, and reflections. Myth 3, SDL is the best approach for adults, can cause problems if the unique needs and goals of learners are not taken into account when structuring learning activities. As with any approach, we must be realistic about the limitations of SDL and use it appropriately. Myth 4, SDL is limited primarily to white, middle-class adults, suggests that this learning method reflects the dominant culture. Although this is one of the main critiques of SDL, Brockett notes that there are examples of SDL across diverse social groups and societies outside North America and Western Europe. Myth 5, SDL is not worth the time required to make it work, depends on a cost-benefit analysis of the learning goals versus the time and resources available. It is true that not all learning can be best accomplished using SDL. Investing in SDL preparation, learning needs diagnosis, determination of a learning plan, and learning assessment engages the learner in a very meaningful way that is likely to result in deeper learning than teacher-directed approaches, making it worth the time. Myth 6, SDL activities are limited primarily to reading and writing, overlooks the informal nature of learning and that many skills cannot be learned from books such as improving a golf swing, speaking a language, building a deck, or training a dog. SDL works best when it is experiential, that is, lodged in the adult's life context (see Chapter 6). The remaining four myths focus more on teachers, pedagogy, and institutions. Myth 7, facilitating self-direction is an easy way out for teachers, is one of the most pervasive myths, according to Brockett (1994). Helping learners be self-directed requires educators to take a very active, individualized approach with learners to communicate the process and support the development of their SDL plan. Learners come to SDL with different needs and

capabilities, making facilitating it as demanding as - if not more demanding than - traditional teaching. Myth 8, SDL is limited primarily to those settings where freedom and democracy prevail, assumes ideal conditions must exist for SDL to occur. Yet SDL certainly occurs in very controlling social and educational environments. Think of the SDL engaged in by protesters in the Arab Spring revolutions or by women and girls who continued their learning in hiding under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Myth 9, self-direction is just another adult education fad, can be debunked just on the longevity of SDL as a theory and practice in adult education for over 50 years. Myth 10, SDL will erode the quality of institutional programs, has not emerged when learners are given greater control over learning. The only risk to quality is when SDL is poorly administered.

References: See next page

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