

2001 CRA
Academic Careers and
Effective Teaching
Workshop

February 4-6, 2001

<http://www.cs.umbc.edu/cra/etw01/>

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled” Plutarch

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” W.B. Yeats

Balancing Teaching, Research And Service

- Objective
 - Look at some issues from a structural or administrative point of view, putting teaching into the larger context of academic life.
- Some observations may seem obvious and others will be familiar to you because of your own experiences as a student and, possibly, as an instructor.
- However, we hope it provides a good starting point for discussion.

Teaching in Context

- Faculty => teaching
 - This is what distinguishes an academic job from an industrial R&D job.
 - Universities thus offer a unique and rich R&D environment mixing research with teaching, training, and mentoring.
- It's importance varies
 - The emphasis on and centrality of teaching varies w.r.t. institution type and individual schools, e.g., big research university vs. small college, public vs. private, etc.
- The role of teaching also varies with time
 - Currently, research universities are placing more emphasis on doing a better job at undergraduate teaching
 - A popular theme is to provide undergraduates with research experiences.
- There are different kinds of teaching
 - from introductory service courses to advanced graduate seminars to continuing education to individual mentoring

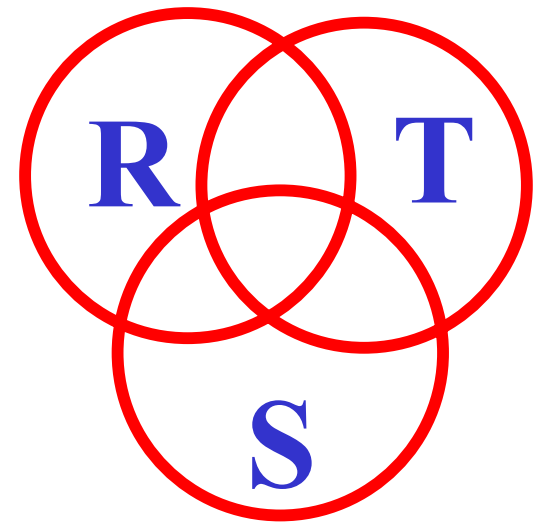
Your goals

Being an effective teacher is important to many of your professional goals:

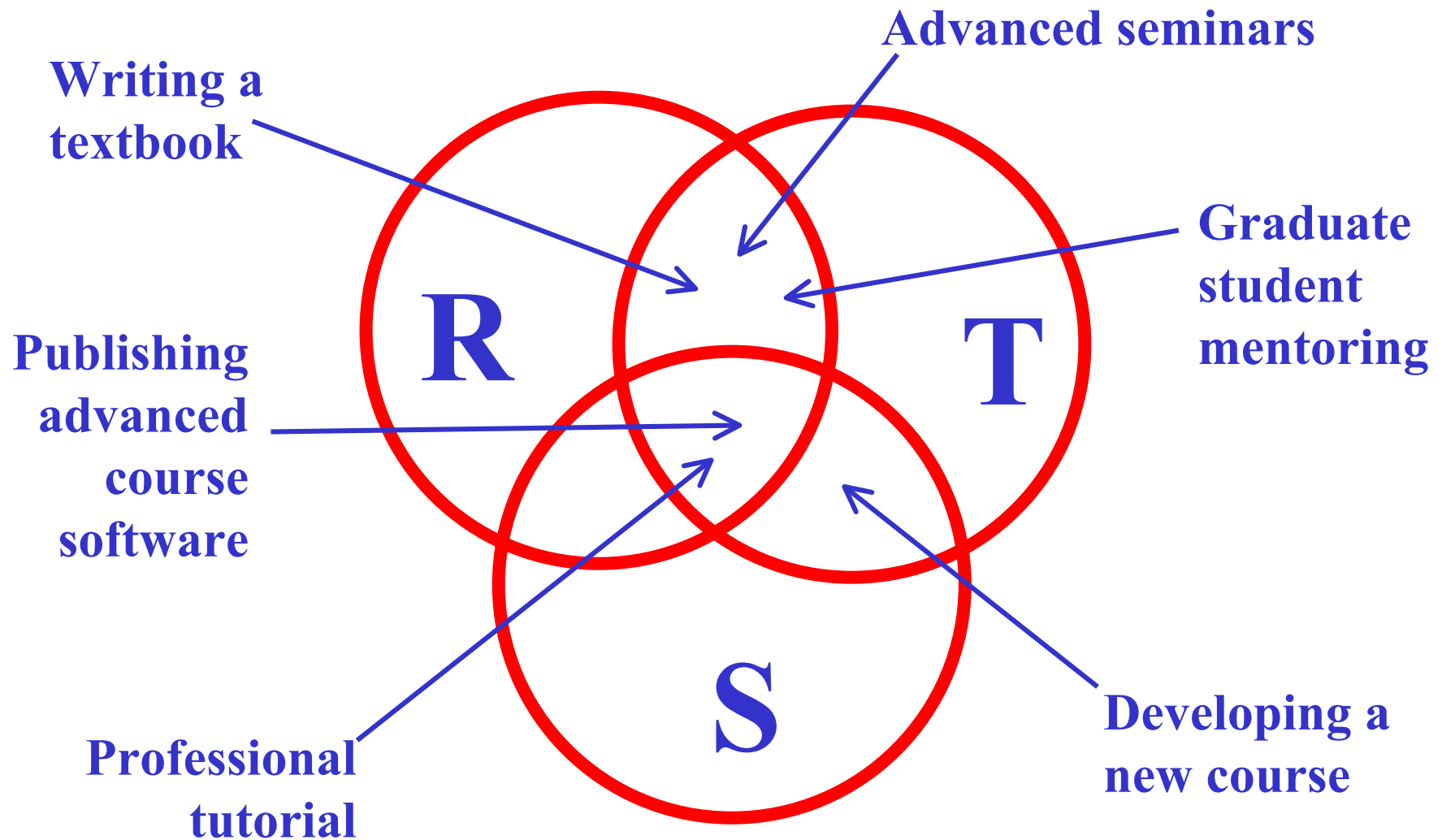
- Being a productive and effective faculty member
- Being promoted and granted tenure
- Finding, training and mentoring people to work with you
- Achieving better understanding and mastery of a subject
- Providing an important and necessary service to society
- Achieving professional recognition and respect
- Building relationships with students, many of whom will become future colleagues

Research, teaching and service

- All academia is divided into three parts
- You must do adequately well in all and hopefully excel in one or more.
- You can't do badly in any
- Thus, you will have to find an appropriate balance between them
- There is so much to do that its difficult to do it all well.
- It helps to find ways to achieve synergy



Synergy among teaching, research and service



How is teaching evaluated for P&T?

- The promotion and tenure process looks at your performance in research, teaching and service.
- The emphasis placed on teaching varies with the institution.
- Your teaching performance will be measured by looking at:
 - **Student course evaluations**
 - Syllabi developed for courses taught
 - Evidence of curriculum and course development
 - Evidence of student mentoring (e.g., projects, thesis, ...)
 - General reputation (i.e. word of mouth)
- Keep your CV and files up to date
 - You'll forget things if you put it off
 - E.g., each semester add entries for independent research projects, theses and dissertation advising and committee participation, etc.

Teaching Evaluation

- Who is doing it?
 - Evaluations can be instituted by universities, departments, or instructors with differing intended uses
- What is being measured?
 - Most evaluations measure “student satisfaction” but some attempt to gauge “what was learned”
 - “what’s learned” is, of course, more important (and harder to measure) but institutions do care about student satisfaction as well.

Official Teaching Evaluations

- Virtually all universities and colleges have a formal system for evaluating teaching performance.
- This is almost always based on student evaluations, e.g. filling out a form near the end of the term
- The results of these evaluations are typically part of the dossier used in tenure and promotion cases.
- They also tend to contain a single, critical summary number

On Evaluating Student Evaluation Scores

- Here are some comments to keep in mind when you are considering your scores (P&T committees will)
 - Scores tend to increase with experience
 - Scores tend to be lower for lower-level undergraduate courses than for more advanced, upper level ones, which tend to be lower than scores for graduate courses.
 - P&T committees are likely to “forgive” low scores if they see a definite trend toward improvement

Doing your own evaluations

- You may want to make up and use your own, course-specific evaluation to help you improve your own teaching.
- This can be done early in the course, allowing you time to use the feedback!
 - Institutional evaluations are typically at the end of the semester and are thus provide no feedback to improve that term's offering.
- This also lets your students know that you take them seriously and are interested in their feedback (which will affect their “satisfaction”).

Should you “teach to the evaluation”

- In general, no.
- However, you should tend to details that students care about that will effect your evaluation, e.g.,
 - Having an appropriately detailed syllabus
 - Providing clear and fair grading criteria in advance
 - Seeing that work is evaluated and graded fairly and quickly
 - Responding to questions, finding the answer for the next time if necessary.

What and how much you teach

- A good teaching assignment can make a big difference in your life.
- This is something to discuss and negotiate with your chair -- how much, what and when you teach
- Remember that you share most of the same goals
 - 1 Educating your students
 - 2 Having a smoothly running Department.
 - 3 Your development as a successful, productive faculty member.
- But might sometimes have a different perspective (e.g., #2 vs #3)

Negotiating workload

- Teaching workload is usually measured in number of courses per year and typically ranges from two to four for research-oriented departments and from four to eight for teaching-oriented departments.
- The impact that your teaching has on the rest of your life depends on other factors as well:
 - how often you are asked to take on a new course
 - how often you must significantly revise the content.
 - how large the courses are
 - their format (e.g., lecture vs. lab vs. seminar)
 - how synergistic they are with your research program, e.g. teaching a lower-level undergrad intro course vs. an advanced graduate seminar

Workload policies

- Teaching workload policies typically allow for reductions for a number of reasons:
 - Being new
 - Having a large research program (measured how?)
 - Contributing part of your academic-year salary (buyouts)
 - Having a large service load (e.g., chairing an important committee, taking on a significant professional service position, e.g. PC of the big conference)
 - Developing a new course
- Don't be afraid to request a change in your teaching assignment if you can explain why it's good for you and the Department.
- But remember that running a Department is a team effort.

Pitfalls to avoid

From an administrative point of view, here are the main pitfalls to avoid

- Devoting too much time to teaching
- Not taking teaching seriously
- Developing a bad reputation with students
- Being seen by your colleagues and chair as not contributing your share to the common instructional responsibility of the Department and University.

Joys to pursue

- Having real and healthy relationships with your students
- Turning on a student on to a subject
- Contributing to the betterment of individuals and society through education
- Helping to better your department and institution
- Gaining real mastery of a subject you care about
- Doing a rich and complicated and important job well

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