

Talking About Your Teaching

Notes from the 10/20/09 workshop

Speaker: Bruce Lenthal, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning

The Center for Teaching and Learning works with graduate students up to senior faculty

Went around the room and had people introduce themselves. People paired up and interviewed each other for 5 minutes. Five minutes may be all you get for discussing teaching.

Questions interviewees got:

- What courses can you teach?
- What is your teaching style?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- How would you structure your courses?
- What is your teaching experience?
- How do you handle being unprepared?
- How do you handle different learning styles? How do you assess students?

Unexpected questions:

- What textbooks would you use?
- What journal articles would you use?
- What are the weaknesses of the American system of education?

This variety of questions shows that it's not predictable what questions you will get. Schools may not do a lot of hiring and might not know what to ask.

What made for good answers?

- Giving examples (for example, how to foster discussions)
- Staying focused on some of the broader questions
- When you haven't yet done something think about what you would do
- Things that can show your experience—how your experience may extrapolate ahead

How do you prepare when you don't know the questions?

- Had them write down their key strengths and some concrete examples that show those strengths

Got back into pairs and switched interviewer/interviewee. You may have a conference interview as noisy as this.

How you show interest: body language, gleam in eye, smiling, being energetic. If interviewers ask an obnoxious question it may be to see how you handle it. Being thoughtful and taking a moment to respond to the question is also a kind of enthusiasm. Some search committees are interested in replicating themselves; others want to expand their differences. Don't assume a committee is united in opinion. People will make decisions based on what they think may want—especially if they're divided.

Questions: How much will a committee expect pedagogy? Should you use buzzwords (e.g., critical thinking)?

Go into the interview knowing yourself; what do you want them to know about you?

Think about what your strengths are. Give thought to the department, the institution, what you value?

To sum up:

- **Know yourself and what you want to convey about yourself as a teacher. It helps you prepare and it helps you be sure you get your message across about what makes you good or special, regardless of the questions.**
- **Think about some examples of your practices that you can showcase briefly.**
- **Be sure to explore the kinds of courses the department and school are likely to want you to teach.**