

**Response to
Report of the Review Committee for the Center for Teaching
February 21, 1999**

The staff of the Center for Teaching is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the February 10, 1999 Report of the Review Committee for the Center for Teaching. This response will be quite brief because we find little to disagree with in the committee's conclusions. We will, however, take this opportunity to comment briefly on each of the areas of excellence noted in the review committee's report as well as each of the areas in which the review committee noted that improvement is possible. We follow the same organizational structure as the report of the review committee.

AREAS OF EXCELLENCE

1. Variety and number of services and activities.

We believe that the University of Iowa, as a large, diverse institution is best served by a variety of approaches to supporting excellence in teaching, and we imagine that the Center for Teaching will always provide this variety. As the Center has matured, we have learned more and more about what appeals to faculty and teaching assistants and is effective in supporting their development. This knowledge will guide us as we prune activities and services and add new ones. We expect that our services and activities will always include some aimed at individuals and some aimed at groups; some sponsored by academic units and some sponsored by the Center and other service units; and some delivered in person, some delivered in print, and some delivered electronically. Within this mix, the specific activities will no doubt change.

2. Quality of staff.

We appreciate the report's comments about the quality of the staff. We have been fortunate to have received the kind of support (e.g., collegiate support for graduate assistants, central support for an upgrade of the Program Associate I position to Program Associate II) we need to recruit and retain excellent individuals. The work we do at the Center has been well received and has been exceptionally rewarding for each of us. The rewarding nature of what we do has contributed to our ability to recruit and retain high quality staff members.

3. Leveraging of funds.

The resources we have been able to bring to bear on our work have been significant, as noted by the review committee. We are currently devoting substantial attention to enhancing those resources by participating in the upcoming comprehensive campaign of the University of Iowa Foundation. We are optimistic about attracting private support for the work of the Center during the course of that campaign.

4. Responsiveness to constituencies.

Being helpful and accessible to those who seek our services are very high priorities to us. We like to say that our default answer is "yes" and it is only with good reason that we override the default. Because we recognize that there are many ways to be an excellent teacher, we try to work with faculty and teaching assistants within the framework of what they already know and believe about teaching and move forward from there.

We also do our best to make our services convenient to our users. For example, we frequently send a work study student to pick up or drop off materials if they are needed quickly and we provide several ways to register for events (including telephone and web-based). We are sensitive to the reality of faculty members' and teaching assistants' lives.

5. Profile of the Center.

We believe that we have a good set of strategies for making our services known on campus and will continue to use most of them. The self-study we conducted identified pockets of campus in which we are less well known and we will target efforts to reach these areas in particular.

We will also continue our cooperation with the University News Service and other University Relations units when we have the opportunity to serve the University's interests. The director of the Center recently appeared in a University Relations video ("Postcards from Iowa") and on the NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw. While these activities do not directly serve our on-campus constituencies, they are likely, in the long term, to help position the Center to benefit from the University's efforts to attract private support and they serve the University's larger goals.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Natural Sciences and Engineering.

On many campuses, as the report notes, "SMET" (Science, Math, Engineering and Technology) departments have been hard for units like the Center for Teaching to reach. On our campus, we believe our contacts with math, and to a growing degree, engineering¹, have been quite positive. We have also had very positive contacts with a number of the departments of the College of Medicine. Our contacts with the physical and life science departments in the College of Liberal Arts have been much less satisfying. We intend, next year, to make particularly strong efforts to recruit a qualified graduate assistant from one of these departments. In addition, we intend efforts to further involve faculty members in

¹ We provided an all-college seminar last semester and are planning another this semester. In addition, the Center's associate director is meeting weekly with a small group of engineering TAs and faculty this semester.

supporting the work the Center for Teaching, and we will target these departments in those efforts.

2. Misperceptions of the Center.

The salience of technology in today's learning environment represents a double-edged sword for the Center. Faculty members' and teaching assistants' interest in using technology in their teaching has provided the Center with a number of opportunities to engage in conversations and activities related to teaching both with and independent of technology. At the same time, faculty members and teaching assistants who are *uninterested* in using new and emerging technologies in their teaching may misperceive the Center's attitude toward technology. In fact, we view computers and the networks that connect them as valuable tools that some teachers may choose to use. But, as we have noted in our newsletter, that choice must be the teacher's. In order to make this clear to our constituencies, we will continue to seek high profile opportunities that are related to teaching but do not emphasize technology.

The view of senior faculty members that the Center exists primarily to serve the needs of the less experienced is unfortunate (if predictable). The senior faculty who have sought our services have seemed quite pleased with what they have learned. We can make further efforts to reach senior faculty in a number of ways, and we also expect that "word of mouth" publicity from satisfied users will continue to help us.

3. Documentation of use.

As we noted in our self-study, the transition from a start up to an ongoing unit is a high priority. We have begun to evaluate tools (primarily software) to assist in documentation of our activities. More importantly, in the long run, we have begun to attempt to document and evaluate the processes we use in operating the Center. We expect that at the time of our next review, we will be able to present very detailed information on our activities.

4. Departmental culture.

As noted in the review report, one of the Center's explicit goals is to strengthen the culture of teaching. We understand that the more local the culture, the more powerful it is, and so we do our best to support efforts within academic units to strengthen the culture of teaching. Because we respect disciplinary and departmental nuances, our strategy has been to be alert to opportunities to support efforts that emerge organically within departments. Culture changes slowly, but we believe that our support has been felt within several departments already. We will continue to be alert to opportunities in this area.

FINAL WORDS

The staff of the Center for Teaching is grateful for the conscientious effort the review committee and the Council on Teaching have dedicated to the job of reviewing our operations. We have learned a great deal from the exercise and we are excited to think about the ways in which we can put what we have learned to use in continuing our efforts to "promote and support efforts to enhance instruction at The University of Iowa."