

Program Description

In existence since fall 2003, the UT Teaching Teams Program (TTP) aims to bridge the gap between faculty expectations and student readiness in large or historically-challenging courses by creating course-specific learning communities, or teaching teams. Modeled after the University of Arizona TTP, the program trains student volunteers to be peer assistants, or preceptors. Preceptors typically work in pairs and function primarily as study group leaders, each pair responsible for one study session per week for their fellow classmates. Faculty instructors, TAs, and a senior preceptor (a former student who excelled in the same course) meet weekly with preceptors to give and receive feedback, discuss course content, and plan study group sessions. This collaboration sets up a constructive feedback loop that energizes faculty, improves student performance, and creates leadership opportunities for motivated undergraduates.

Program Assessment and Evaluation

The Teaching Teams Program has had a positive impact on participants, based on 1) student grade and participation data and 2) end of semester evaluations.

For the past several academic years, preceptors have earned, on average, one letter grade higher than the other students in the course. Moreover, in half of the courses we support, study group participants have earned significantly higher grades and/or were less likely to drop or fail the course than non-participants.

On end of semester evaluations, preceptors reported that facilitating study groups helped them get to know the professor and other students better, improved their ability to explain concepts and ideas to others, and motivated them to keep up with their coursework. Approximately 90% of preceptors reported that they would be a preceptor again if TTP study groups were offered in a future course.

"...being a preceptor motivated me to understand the material better so that I would be able to answer students' questions, and find ways to work the problems out in a fashion that made understanding the concepts easier. I think becoming a preceptor was one of the best choices I have made."

What student participants appreciated most about study groups were the opportunities to ask questions in a low-risk environment and to collaborate with and learn from other students.

"It really helps to have other students...in the same shoes as you--learning the material and trying to grasp it. It's extremely helpful to have students with different levels of understanding and we could all collaborate to better understand the...material."

What faculty appreciated most about the program was having regular contact with and learning from their students:

"I found that meeting with the preceptors...was quite beneficial to me, as an instructor. The preceptors provided feedback about the course and I was able to better understand what the students were 'getting' and what they were struggling with...In addition, having the opportunity to meet with a small group of students made the teaching experience more enjoyable for me."

In addition to the solid learning benefits that result from a peer-assisted learning program, the Teaching Teams Program is an administratively attractive model because of its low cost. The primary cost is the staff time associated with coordination of the program and the training and supervision of preceptors and senior preceptors. Our model has an additional cost because it involves the use of paid senior preceptors who supervise the preceptors and help organize the study groups. However, the program works equally well on a smaller scale without the senior preceptor and with adequate faculty supervision.

UT Teaching Teams Program, 3-Year Comparison

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Participating courses	BIO 320 Cell Biology (4) BIO 325 Genetics (5) BIO 226T Host-Microbe Interactions (2) CH 310M Organic Chemistry I (1) CH 339K Biochemistry I (1) CH 339L Biochemistry II (1)	BIO 325 Genetics (11) BIO 226T Host-Microbe Interactions (2) BIO 360K Immunology (1) BIO 361 Human Infectious Diseases (1) C C 302 Introduction to Roman Civilization (1) CH 339K Biochemistry I (1) CH 369 Fundamentals of Biochemistry (2)	BIO 416K Physiology and Functional Anatomy I (2) BIO 325 Genetics (10) BIO 326M Medical Microbiology (2) BIO 360K Immunology (1) BIO 361 Human Infectious Diseases (1) BIO 365S Vertebrate Physiology II (1) CH 339K Biochemistry I (3) CH 339L Biochemistry II (2) CH 369 Fundamentals of Biochemistry (3)
Lecture courses	15	19	25
Faculty participants	12	12	18
Preceptors	113	155	205
Senior preceptors	11	12	17
Study group sessions	448	901	931
Total participants	539	731	1443
Total enrolled students	1406	2164	3175
% repeat participation	53.5%	67.5%	63.7%
Peer-to-peer interactions	2154	3961	5982
Cost per interaction	\$2.97	\$1.79	\$1.99

The number listed in parentheses indicates the number of lecture courses supported.