During the 2012–2013 and the 2013–2014 academic years, Stanford and San José State Universities implemented a graduate-student mentoring partnership. With the support of Stanford’s Center for Teaching and Learning, vice provost of graduate education, and School of Humanities and Sciences—and with the generous participation of San José State University (SJSU) administrators and faculty—a total of 14 Stanford doctoral students were matched with SJSU mentors from their fields. They shadowed these mentors for a quarter, while meeting weekly as a cohort in a practicum seminar.

Following individual learning contracts that they developed with their mentors, these graduate students immersed themselves in the daily demands of working faculty members on a comprehensive state university campus—attending not only classes but also office hours, department meetings, and university governance proceedings. In reflective journals and end-of-term assessments, the graduate students reported

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In Short

- Special effort is required to diversify the professional perspectives and experiences of graduate students from highly selective private institutions, who may be seen as having less commitment to teaching than their counterparts from public institutions and little experience of students with a wide range of backgrounds, preparations, life experiences, and goals.
- In Stanford and San José State’s graduate-student mentoring partnership, students shadowed their faculty mentors and took a seminar where they discussed relevant readings and shared their experiences on the SJSU campus.
- The students’ experiences inside their mentors’ classes, offices, and meetings let them see aspects of faculty life that are not often visible to graduate students and helped prepare them for the faculty role at a wide variety of institutions.
- The faculty mentors were eager to share with their mentees what they wished they had known when they started out, even as they learned from their mentees about new scholarly developments.
that they appreciated the richly illuminating perspective and professional preparation that the program gave them.

The experience was valuable to faculty mentors as well, offering them an opportunity to rekindle their enthusiasm for their life’s work by helping prepare prospective junior colleagues for academic careers. And administrators from both institutions were drawn to the project by a sense of shared commitment to the young professionals who leave one institution as new PhDs and join the other as new faculty.

**Program Rationale**

Graduate students from highly selective private institutions such as Stanford are at a disadvantage when applying for jobs in public, broad-access universities because they may be seen as having less commitment to the teaching mission than their counterparts from public institutions. Special effort is required to diversify these graduate students’ professional perspective and experience—not only because the narrowed job market favors more broadly prepared candidates but because many graduate students would find work in the comprehensive sector to be personally rewarding.

Further, faculty at comprehensive institutions possess a breadth of expertise from which graduate students stand to learn a great deal: in planning and delivering successful courses on a demanding schedule, as well as reaching out to and addressing the needs of students with a diverse range of backgrounds, preparations, life experiences, and goals. Watching and learning from these faculty represents an invaluable professional-development opportunity. But it also requires an unusual level of cooperation across campuses and sectors.

**The Model**

In 1993 the Council of Graduate Schools and the Association of American Colleges and Universities created Preparing Future Faculty, a national initiative that created graduate teaching mentorships at a wide range of institutions and that continues to this day on some campuses, such as Duke University and the University of Maryland (see URLs on p. 49). Adopting a number of best practices from that program (to which ours pays homage in its title), we created a multi-stage process to match graduates and mentors and to lead both through a successful experience.

First, we selected SJSU faculty whose records indicated their high potential as mentors in such a program. We then matched these mentors with advanced doctoral students who were nominated by departments across the humanities and sciences. We asked the mentors and students to develop learning contracts that specified expectations for the student’s attendance at and involvement in one of the mentor’s classes; we also asked both to reflect on the experience throughout the term in a journal and at the end of the term in a summative assessment.

Throughout the mentoring quarter, the students met once a week in a credit-bearing practicum to share their experiences at SJSU and to develop their own professional plans. At the end of the term, both students and their faculty mentors submitted a final assessment that summarized their experiences and offered guidance for the planners.

The response from both the doctoral students and mentors has been uniformly positive. The students reported that the experience “exceeded [their] expectations” in the level of attention they received from their mentors and the quality of the learning that they experienced.

The format encouraged deep reflection throughout the term, and it supported the students as they identified areas in which they hoped to develop as teachers, as well as goals for their professional futures. The students clearly appreciated the opportunities the program gave them to broaden and deepen their experience.

**The Practicum**

The practicum seminar consisted of 10 weekly 90-minute sessions during the Stanford winter quarter. Required of all participating Stanford students, the practicum was also open to Stanford and SJSU faculty and administrators involved in the program, who could attend on a drop-in basis.

The practicum had two components. In the first 30 minutes of each session, participants discussed readings on contextual and practical themes, from the changing demographics of higher education to the academic job market and career paths. In a series of early sessions, they looked at the various types of institutions and expectations for faculty teaching, research and service at them.

The mid-term sessions were devoted to new developments in teaching and learning, course design, and research-driven pedagogy. The final sessions looked at the job-application process, from initial written materials to campus visits and negotiating job offers.

In the remaining time in each session, participants shared their previous week’s experiences at SJSU, enabling them to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences across fields, as well as between institutions like Stanford and SJSU.

**On Teaching Across the Disciplines**

*Becky Richardson, English student*

I particularly enjoyed the interdisciplinary aspect of the Practicum discussions, and the chance to delve into the challenges of teaching in one’s particular discipline (what a “flipped classroom” looks like across disciplines—how to use humor—how to use hands-on activities in the classroom—etc.).

**Glimpses of Their Future Careers: Reports from the Mentees**

The classroom experiences at SJSU varied considerably by discipline and division. For example, Bob Rawle, a Stanford chemistry graduate student working with SJSU chemistry professor Lionel Cheruzel, sat in on the upper-division inorganic chemistry class of about 30 students and later taught two of the sessions.
His second lecture, the last of the course, was on the applications of inorganic chemistry to biology. Since this material was not required, he thought that few students might show up. But to his delight, he had a full house—many of the students were forensic-science majors, and thus the connection with biology was probably of particular interest to them.

Meanwhile, Carolyn MacDonald, a classics doctoral student, took note of the way her mentor, Matthew Spangler, gave feedback to students in his communications class: He sent students electronic audio files of his evaluation of their performances. This led to a seminar discussion of what this feedback format must be like for both professors and students and whether it is a new trend in some evaluation situations.

Biology student Rachel Egger noted that one of the classes she attended had a particularly diverse array of SJSU undergraduates: Many were older than traditional college age (very rare at Stanford), one was pregnant, and many chose the early-morning Friday section to juggle a job later in the day. This was her first valuable experience of the student population she might well be teaching in the future.

Esra Burak, a student in sociology at Stanford, observed that in the 40-student social-theory class she attended, the professor, Preston Rudy, made a concerted effort in the first two sessions to have all students (and himself) learn everyone else’s name. She thought that his effort had a real impact on the communications among the students and between them and Rudy.

The Stanford students found opportunities to apply what they learned from their mentors to their own teaching. For example, English student Allen Frost’s observations of his mentor Adrienne Eastwood’s teaching style informed the discussions of course development that he and other TAs were having in the English department at Stanford.

The classroom experiences cut both ways, however. In the first cohort, a Stanford physics doctoral student, Kassa Betre, introduced some active-learning activities in the SJSU class session he taught, and it went so well that the professor has since introduced more such exercises in his classes.

Just as valuable as the lessons from inside their mentors’ classes are those the students derived from sharing aspects of faculty life not often visible to graduate students. Burak attended a university-wide, three-hour Academic Senate meeting where she saw how faculty grapple with issues that cut across departments and colleges, as well as the give and take of shared governance at this higher and broader level.

Another student, Rob Furrow, attended meetings for two special programs, Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) and the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE). Both provide students with the opportunity to do undergraduate research. MARC is for junior and seniors in various fields who are applying to graduate school, while RISE is for freshman and sophomores, who receive unit or work-study credit for participation in faculty members’ research. Furrow gave a talk to the former group on graduate education.

Becky Richardson, a graduate student in English, shadowed her mentor during office hours and was able to see the daily struggles of students who were parents, veterans, or (in one case) newly homeless. Her experience at SJSU exposed her to a much more diverse set of students than she had seen at Stanford but that captured the broad and changing demographics of American higher education.

Carolyn MacDonald, the doctoral student in classics, attended a Communications Studies Department meeting, where she watched the faculty, when introducing themselves, specify which courses they taught and articulate one way in which they hoped to improve their teaching.

During his experience at SJSU, another Stanford student, Allen Frost, attended a job presentation for the English department’s search for a new chair; a discussion of institutional mission and its variation from one campus to another followed. He came away with an enriched perspective on academic leadership styles, conflict management, and the value of an English major.

Chemistry student Bob Rawle had a discussion with his mentor, Lionel Cheruzel, on assessment in the SJSU chemistry department. Then, in the practicum, Rawle shared what

**ON COURSE DEVELOPMENT**  
_Jesse Davie-Kessler, anthropology student_

Professor Chuck Darrah suggested that I develop weekly topics and readings for a course based on a series of questions, one question per week. Together, the questions should form a narrative for what students will learn during the course. I’ve already tried using this technique for my in-development anthropology of religion class, and it was incredibly helpful.

**ON CLASS ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS**  
_Kassa Betre, physics student_

As a TA, all I thought of assignments was that they’re winnowing forks needed to separate the A students from the Bs etc. Professor Peter Beyersdorff thinks of assignments as part of the education. He has very well-developed rubrics that measure mastery of various components of the learning objectives that he determined before the beginning of the course.

He gave the students extensive feedback early in the course so they clearly understood what they’re being assessed on. Since the students have the rubrics and learning objectives available to them, grading was easy and efficient for Peter, which ended up saving him grading time.
PRACTICUM ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE GRADUATE STUDENTS

WRITTEN REFLECTIONS - Students wrote to the following prompts:

STARTING POINTS
1. What are your learning objectives for this experience?
2. How can your participation in the course help you meet those objectives? How do you think your mentor might help you meet those objectives?
3. What are you most apprehensive about?
4. What assets (knowledge, skills, dispositions, prior experiences) do you “bring to the table” that you expect to draw upon?

WEEKLY WRITTEN REFLECTIONS
Once each week, please briefly describe something that transpired in your SJSU class (something you did or observed), or in conversation with a student, or in conversation with your mentor. Then briefly reflect on that event and how it has affected your thoughts about the teaching and learning process, broadly considered.

WRAP-UP REFLECTIONS
1. Review your “Starting Points” notes about your goals and expectations for this experience. How accurate were you? Consider those areas where your lived experience differed from your expectations. Briefly describe them, and what insight(s) you gleaned from them.
2. As a result of your participation in the PFP program, how has your theory of student learning evolved, along with your sense of how teaching can stimulate, support, and deepen it?
3. What might you, or your mentor, or the program staff have done (differently) to make this a more effective learning experience for you?

BEYOND-THE-COURSE EXPLORATIONS
Campuses typically offer a wide array of resources, to support faculty in their many roles (as teachers, as researchers, as members of their professional communities, etc.). We want you to check out what SJSU provides.

1. Check out the Center for Faculty Development (CFD) website (www.sjsu.edu/cfd/). Peruse the offerings and resources under each of the major headings. Talk with your mentor about how some of these resources might be useful to someone getting started in a tenure-track position. You are welcome to participate in any event or session that looks interesting to you.
2. Check out the Academic Technology/eCampus website (www.sjsu.edu/at/). Talk with your mentor about how some of these resources might be useful. As with CFD offerings, you are welcome to participate in any event or session that interests you.
3. Check out the ML King Jr. Library website (http://library.sjsu.edu/). Skim the various sections, including Faculty Services (under the Services area). Identify the library liaison for your discipline. Have that person (and/or your mentor) help you identify the many resources provided by the library staff to assist you in developing your courses and/or your research agenda.
4. Check out the support offered by Student Academic Success Services (http://www.sjsu.edu/sass/). Click on the Spartan Success portal. Check out the support offered by the Accessible Education Center (http://www.aec.sjsu.edu/) and Counseling Services (http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling/). Consider how you might make students aware of these resources.
5. Take a walk around campus. Try to get a feel for the “student culture.” Where do students in your mentor’s department tend to hang out? Check out those spots. What are students doing in the library? Get a feel for what goes on at every level (basement, main floor, and floors 2-8). Your library liaison can arrange to give you a behind-the-scenes tour. What are students doing in the Student Union? Check out the various rooms and lounge areas upstairs and on the main floor.
he had heard about assessment, which generated a broader discussion of assessing teaching in an age of digital recording. The more widespread availability of recorded classes means that the college classroom—which, in the past, was a very private setting—is now more open to observation and evaluation.

Several of the Stanford students spent informal time at SJSU in the cafeteria, library, and bookstore, where most of the student conversations they overheard were about work (most students work at least part time). Some have onerous commutes: One, for example, made a regular two-hour commute from his work job site to his evening three-hour course.

In summary, we were very impressed not only with the range of experiences to which the graduate students were exposed but also the depth of their learning. As a side benefit, we noted that the participating students shared their experiences with graduate students in their home departments, thus enriching their cohort’s shared professional perspectives.

ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS
Nick Viles, history student

Watching Prof. Libra Hilde interact with her students reinforced my belief that my biggest challenge as a teacher is forging interpersonal relationships with students outside of structured class time. When I first entered the program, I thought this was important because it would make me feel more comfortable and less awkward, but after seeing the results of Prof. Hilde’s interaction with students, I have come to realize that forging relationships with students also improves their performance, motivation, and curiosity.

In the past, I realized that I have tried to replicate the success that Prof. Hilde has with her students by being nice and friendly. Observing Prof. Hilde has encouraged me to refocus my efforts away from obsessively cultivating a superficial approachable manner toward fostering interactions based upon the way my own interests, concerns, and research interact with those of my students. I have an even deeper appreciation for the importance of opening up to students, not only for my own comfort but to help maximize student achievement.

Money is an issue for many of the SJSU students. Very few have laptops, and the high cost of textbooks is a serious issue. Knowing this, many professors try various ways to keep these costs down, such as using open-source materials.

In summary, we were very impressed not only with the range of experiences to which the graduate students were exposed but also the depth of their learning. As a side benefit, we noted that the participating students shared their experiences with graduate students in their home departments, thus enriching their cohort’s shared professional perspectives.

ON NEW PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES
Egle Cekanaviciute, biology student

I understood the importance of regular homework assignments and multiple tests (instead of a single final exam) in encouraging students to learn throughout the semester and not just before the exam. I learned some basic rules of teaching that I never thought about before: for example, not asking the question up front, but asking people to work on it in pairs for 30 seconds and then tell the answer to the class. All these ideas and techniques have been very useful, and I’ve been noticing that the best teachers both at Stanford and at SJSU use them.

Although one might initially imagine that this program chiefly benefitted the graduate students, indications from the outset suggested how much the mentors stood to gain as well. We approached faculty with strong reputations as dedicated teachers and respected colleagues, expecting that some of them might turn us down. Yet all but one accepted the invitation immediately and enthusiastically—eager, despite their full schedules, to contribute to a prospective colleague’s preparation. (The one who declined was on sabbatical and is now part of our second cohort.)

We gained insight into the faculty mentors’ motivation at our kick-off dinner, where we learned that the mentors had stories to tell about their own career preparation that mirrored the graduate-school experience their mentees were having. All had been trained at elite institutions, and they had envisioned their future careers based on what they had seen, up close, under the tutelage of their advisors.

But once at SJSU, they faced a world that bore little resemblance to what they had imagined. The teaching responsibilities were far greater. The students were more diverse in every way imaginable: educational background and preparation, goals and aspirations, resources, language, and culture. Given the resource constraints at less well-endowed universities, establishing laboratories required more creativity and ingenuity than it had at the universities from which they had come. And the urban-commuter context created a very different campus feel.

The mentors had stories to tell about their own career preparation that mirrored the graduate-school experience their mentees were having.
They were eager to share with their mentees what they wished they had known when they started out. “It wasn’t that it was better or worse—it was just really, really different than I expected. It was really quite disorienting at first,” one psychology faculty member disclosed. There was a consensus that they were looking forward to providing that “bridge” for their mentees, along with guidance about how to navigate this kind of institution successfully.

A few weeks into the experience, we checked in with the faculty again. Several themes emerged from their comments. First and foremost, they were enjoying being mentors. One professor reported looking forward to the time he spent on Sunday evenings, planning what he would guide his graduate student through during the upcoming week: ways to present content, ways to interact with students he anticipated would have difficulties, and other tricks of the trade. Another professor said she enjoyed providing feedback to her mentee after observing her work one-on-one with students as they tackled big assignments.

Second, they were enjoying “bringing their ‘A’ game,” as one faculty member phrased it. Knowing that their mentees were watching and that they would undoubtedly want to talk about what they had observed, the faculty mentors took pains to “do it right,” and they voiced a certain amount of appreciation for being shaken out of complacency.

Third, as the mentors and students spent time together and as the students opened up about their own work, the mentors enjoyed learning from their mentees. Several talked about new perspectives the conversations gave them about their own areas of scholarship.

These themes were reprised and reinforced in the conversations we had with the mentors at the close of the program.

**Institutional Perspectives**

The final stakeholders for this enterprise were the institutions themselves. One might be skeptical that this sort of “boutique” program could make much of a difference to the partner institutions themselves. But early feedback suggests otherwise.

Administrators at both institutions have been quick to recognize the potential for far-reaching benefits. SJSU Provost Andy Feinstein captured the sentiments of academic leaders at both campuses, reflecting that “this program is clearly a ‘win-win’ for everyone—through this kind of collaborative effort, we are much better able to help both future and current faculty deepen their appreciation of many facets of their roles as educators, and, ultimately, to better equip them to meet the needs of the broad range of students making their way to colleges and universities.”

As students have shared their candid observations and experiences, departments at Stanford—as well as the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and the Center for Teaching and Learning (two of the program’s sponsors)—have begun to consider elements to add to the resources and guidance offered to their graduate students. Some have also begun to broaden what they share about faculty roles and lived experience at other kinds of institutions. Meanwhile, their counterparts at SJSU are thinking more systematically about the kinds of support that might make the transition for new professors into their first academic positions smoother and less challenging.

As we move ahead with our second cohort, and as we look to expand the program to include new partner institutions, we see the potential for a very fruitful larger conversation about how to work across institutions to prepare the next generation of professors.

**Assignments for the Mentors**

**Starting Points**
1. What do you hope that your graduate student will learn from this experience? (As appropriate opportunities arise, please be sure to share your thoughts about this question with him/her.)
2. What would you like to gain from this experience yourself?

**Wrap-Up Reflections for Mentors**
1. Review your notes about what you hoped you and your mentee would gain from this experience. How accurate were you? Consider those areas where your lived experience differed from your expectations. Briefly describe them, and what insight(s) you gleaned from them.
2. What might you, or your mentee, or the program staff have done (differently) to make this a more effective experience (for you or your mentee)?

**Websites for Preparing Future Faculty Programs**
- http://www.preparing-faculty.org/
- http://gradschool.duke.edu/prof_dev/pff/
- http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/pff.php