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Teaching Matters: A Guide for Graduate Students (Review)

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Haynie, Aeron and Stephanie Spong (2022). *Teaching Matters: A Guide for Graduate Students*, West Virginia University Press. 240 pp. \$24.99 paper back. ISBN: 978-1-952271-55-7.

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Despite growing popular interest in pedagogy and higher education, many graduate students across most disciplines receive little to no training before they begin to teach at the college level. Even in programs where pedagogical training is offered in the form of coursework, workshops, or mentoring, few comprehensive teaching guides cater explicitly to new graduate student instructors, who occupy a unique, often challenging position in academic institutions. Aeron Haynie and Stephanie Spong aim to provide a corrective—or at least supplementary—resource with their new book, *Teaching Matters: A Guide for Graduate Students*. Haynie and Spong have written a handbook, as advertised, to help graduate student instructors navigate the various challenges they face when teaching, be they professional, mental, or logistical hurdles. Especially given interruptions and shifts in learning modalities since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, *Teaching Matters* offers a desperately needed set of resources to support graduate students who must teach in the ever-evolving 21st century classroom.

In their guide for graduate student instructors, Haynie and Spong (2022) advocate for learner-centered course design, which places greater emphasis on learning outcomes than on course coverage or breadth. Rigor, they argue, is not sacrificed when educators cut down on content in favor of deeper learning (p. 132). Peppered with evidence-based findings of learning science and pedagogical literature, *Teaching Matters* is organized around common areas of concern for graduate instructors, with chapters that prompt questions like, “How Can You Create a Welcoming Classroom Community?” “How Do You Develop a Classroom Practice?” Perhaps the most utilitarian advice comes in “Creating Assignments and Responding to Student Work,” which is especially helpful for graduate student instructors in the humanities and instructors of writing-intensive courses. Other sections demystify challenges most new graduate student instructors cannot anticipate with a question, such as “Navigating Classroom Challenges” and “Cultivating Well-Being.” Throughout this guide, and especially in a chapter that asks, “What Are Other Graduate Students Experiencing?” anecdotes provide relatable stumbling blocks and potential pathways to put the target reader at ease. By offering up their own stories—as well as their interviewees’—the authors reassure graduate student instructors that pedagogical growing pains are common.

Of course, teaching anecdotes here and elsewhere always hinge on disciplinary specificities. How to rethink the undergraduate biology lab for online learning, for instance, bears little practical relevance to graduate instructors in the

humanities. While Haynie and Spong's (2022) commitment to disciplinary breadth is admirable, it is worth noting that these sections are better skimmed than studied for readers in other fields for whom the face-to-face ("F2F") and online classrooms look considerably different. As is often the case when scholars marry theoretical frameworks with practice, some disciplinary language goes undefined in *Teaching Matters*. It would be helpful to include a glossary of terms for those who are not steeped in the institutional structures the authors sometimes take for granted. For example, what qualifies as a regional comprehensive college or university? What do we make of university systems that include both Research 1 (R1) institutions and campuses of other status? A parsing of these taxonomical terms would further demystify the institutional dynamics the authors want to translate into practical knowledge for graduate students.

While there is no shortage of guidebooks in the field of pedagogy, *Teaching Matters* ultimately fills a crucial contextual gap by gearing itself toward the typically ignored graduate student instructor. Haynie and Spong (2022) provide a wealth of practical advice, but they are most insightful when analyzing the power dynamics of the college classroom. Attuned to "the unique position of [graduate student instructors] in the middle of the academic hierarchy," *Teaching Matters* does not shy away from the early teaching challenges that stem from graduate students' discomfort with—or impulse to replicate prior structures of—power (Haynie and Spong, 2022, p. 181). With this guide for graduate students, we can understand feminist pedagogy to include not only theoretical and practical commitments to certain liberatory teaching methods and student outcomes, but also the liberation of new instructors themselves from institutional power dynamics and traditional forms of knowledge making.

The same spirit of inclusion with which the authors fill the training gap for academia's precarious graduate student instructors is extended to the undergraduates they teach, sometimes without adequate training or resources. Haynie and Spong's (2022) commitment to course design that serves diverse student populations goes beyond the usual theoretical ruminations on identity and socioeconomic status: their assignments, activities, and emergency plans provide tangible ways to foster inclusive learning environments at different types of institutions. This pedagogical guide provides growing feminist educators with material resources they can use to decenter power in the college classroom and foster accessible, engaging learning experiences for their students. *Teaching Matters* should be essential reading for graduate students at the start of their teaching journeys, whether in the absence of pedagogical training or to supplement existing training programs.