

There is a well-known saying: "Who dares to teach must never cease to learn."

This is the Center for Faculty Excellence's (CFE) *raison d'être*. While each department conducts its own new instructor workshop during the summer, CFE is an Academy-wide effort to serve those instructors seeking further mentoring during the academic year. It was founded in 1994 with a mission "to provide consultation and resources to faculty, conduct educational research and development, and serve as a conduit of educational information." It does this by offering tools and tips for teaching, various brown bag sessions, faculty development workshops, an annual academic luncheon, and most of all a Master Teaching Certificate Program (MTP).

Launched in 2004, "MTP is anchored in the belief that teaching and learning are inextricably linked—that faculty members are learners as well as teachers, and students are teachers as well as learners," according to CFE's website. Designed to continue the development West Point's teachers received in their academic department's individual new instructor summer workshop, MTP has grown tenfold in ten years. "We originally had 20 graduates," says Dr. Mark Evans, CFE Director. "Now, there are approximately 200 faculty members in the program at any given time." In the beginning, every MTP candidate was paired with a mentor, a senior faculty member from another academic department who would coach that candidate on topics relevant to teaching at West

Point and assess his or her classroom techniques. But with the growth of the program, only about a quarter of the candidates have individual mentors today. "There aren't enough senior faculty members at USMA to match up with all the MTP candidates," says Evans, but he notes that he and his Deputy Director, Dr. Steve Finn, directly mentor and coach all the candidates as they proceed through the program. These two directors and the senior faculty mentors play the role of "master teachers" and observe at least two class sessions of each MTP participant teacher, coaching them on areas that need improvement.

As a separate classroom activity itself, MTP occurs over the course of four semesters (two years). Diversified groups of ten meet once a month around CFE's conference table and discuss assigned readings on a variety of teaching topics. The group members represent all different Academy departments—all academic departments plus the departments of Military Instruction, Physical Education, Professional Military Ethics, Tactical, and even Band (if someone mentors cadets, he or she is eligible for MTP)—which is integral to the success of the program. Early on, MTP coaches the teachers on developing their teaching philosophies (a one- to two-page document that Evans says "helps one to develop the framework of the teacher he or she wants to be") and explores the psycho-social development of the undergraduate, theories of



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Eight USMA faculty members receive certificates at the 2013 MTP graduation.

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—Dr. Mark Evans, CFE Director

classroom motivation, and learning styles. Later in the program, MTP turns to “active learning” strategies, course design, and classroom assessment techniques. The capstone project of MTP is a classroom research paper or a literature review on a topic relevant to teaching. “Everything about MTP relates to shaping and framing the participants’ ideas on teaching and student learning,” says Evans.

MTP allows ample opportunity for participants to reflect on these ideas. They write reflection papers based on their assigned readings, and they complete a reflection-related activity at the end of each semester. “Evidence indicates that a hallmark of an effective teacher is practicing self-reflection,” says Evans, “and these exercises are designed to develop that habit of reflection among MTP participants.” End-of-the-semester feedback demonstrates that MTP’s self-reflection coaching is heightening the participants’ self-awareness in the classroom. One survey response from 2010 states: “The readings, reflection papers, and discussions have made me aware of the things I am doing right and highlighted things that will make my classroom environment and course structure that much better;” and another, asking respondents to describe “how MTP activities improved you as a teacher,” states: “MTP forced me to think more about how I teach and less about what I teach.”

Yet, the biggest take-away reported from MTP is the interaction faculty members have with those from different departments. Lieutenant Colonel Jakob Bruhl, who went through the program in 2008 when he was a major teaching civil engineering, says, “What you learn from your peers in the program is as valuable (and perhaps more at times) than what you get from the readings.” Then-Major Brian Novoselich ’96, who taught mechanical engineering at USMA from 2006-09, echoes this, saying,

“Meeting faculty members outside your department is a great way to expand your teaching knowledge base.” In this way, MTP’s peer coaching resembles the Academy’s Cadet Leader Development System. “No single course or professor can produce leaders,” said Brigadier General (Retired) Daniel Kaufman ’68, former Dean of the Academic Board, in a brochure detailing USMA’s vision of teaching and learning. “It is the West Point experience; a combination of challenges guided by our dedicated faculty and staff that produces the leaders needed by our Army and our Nation.” CFE’s MTP is dedicated to helping USMA faculty members meet the challenge of challenging cadets in every class they teach. ★



Turning Technologies, an industry leader in student response systems, conducts a training session for USMA faculty as part of CFE’s brown bag series.

Photos: Patrick Gill/USMA, Anthony DiNoro/WPAOG staff