

# Preparing Future Agricultural Sciences Faculty: An Evaluation of a Cohort Program



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## Program Purpose

Teaching at the university level is a challenge for all who embark upon it. The goal of this program is to help doctoral students become better prepared for a career in academia through the development of contemporary research skills along with sound teaching practices.

- ❖ Program Participants: observe university teaching faculty, practice teaching skills, and gain knowledge of faculty experiences and expectations while developing a philosophy, methodology, and individual teaching goals.
- ❖ The program format provides students with extensive time to investigate teaching and student advising techniques, learn from experienced faculty, and develop their own student centered teaching practices.

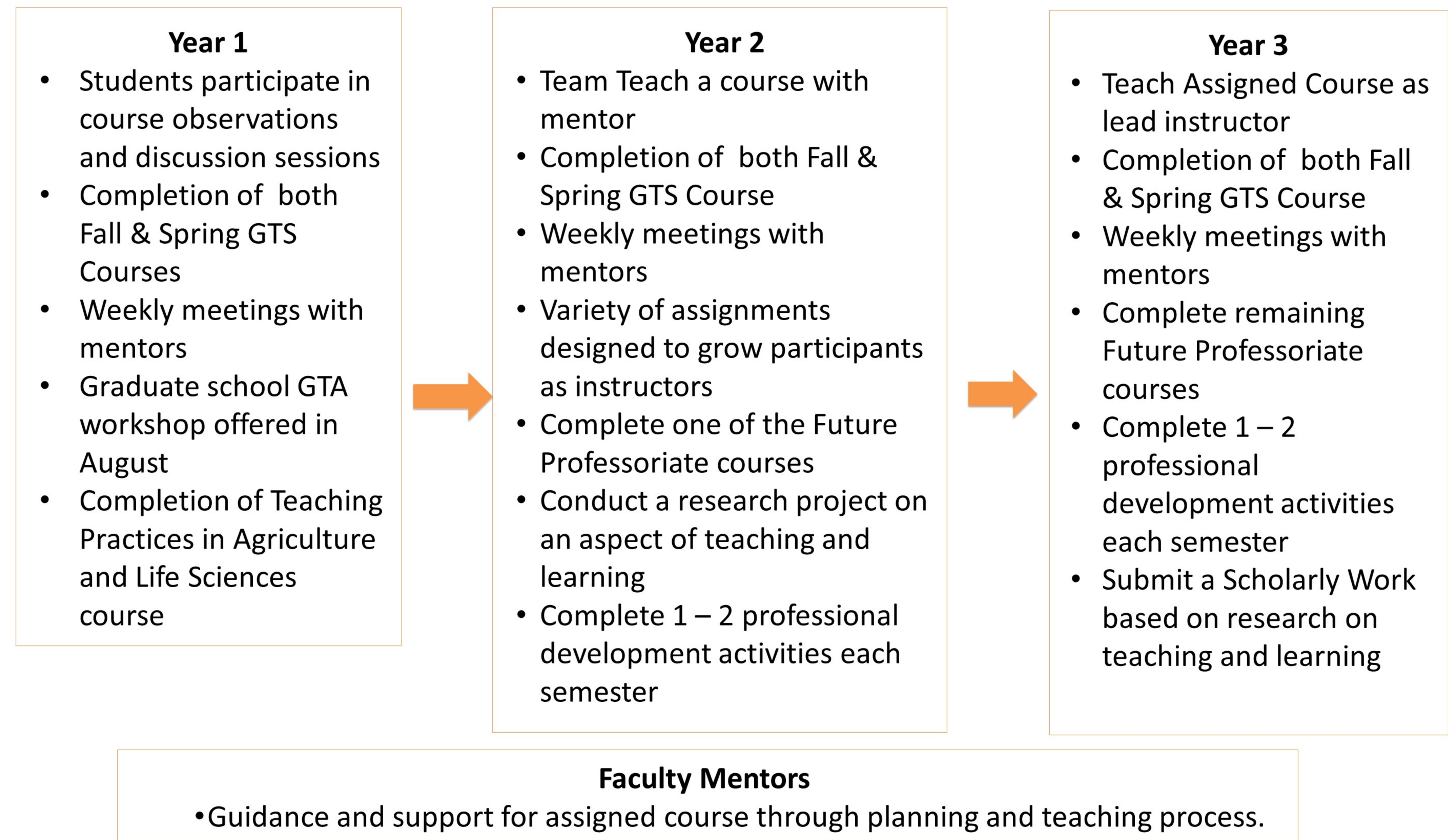
## Theoretical Framework

- ❖ Institutions, students and parents are expecting an increase in teaching ability in higher-education (Austin, 2003) and the job market is defined by both the demands of teaching and research (Austin, 2002).
- ❖ Communities of Practice (CoP) are the reification of the theories of social structure, theories of identity and theories of situated experience in the context of social theory of learning (Wenger 1998). CoPs are groups of individuals with differing levels of expertise engaging with each other to improve their skills. They share a domain, a common practice, and community (Wenger, 1998).

## Methodology

Interviews and focus-groups were conducted with current program participants ( $n=5$ ), program alumni ( $n=5$ ), faculty mentors ( $n=4^*$ ), and administrators ( $n=5^*$ ). The asterisk represents a duplicate. Transcripts were line-by-line open coded. Codes, analytical memos and field notes were then used to develop themes. Triangulation was created by collecting data from three populations. Inter-relator reliability was utilized in the final-theme development (Creswell, 2013).

## Program Overview



## Results

### Theme 1. Participants Perceptions and Experiences of the Components of the Program

- ❖ All components were recognized as valuable for learning, emphasized lead teaching.

### Theme 2. Recruitment & Finding Successful Scholars

- ❖ Not appropriate for every PhD, because of work load, passion for teaching is required.

### Theme 3. Development of Community of Practice

- ❖ Long-term interactions, care for teaching and research: created social learning experience.

### Theme 4. Preparation for a Career in Academia

- ❖ Tensions between research and academic demands allowed students to practice balance.

### Theme 5. Areas for Improvement

- ❖ Consistent feedback, clear mentor relationships, and greater support for research project.

## Implications

- ❖ Experience as a Teaching Assistant is not enough
- ❖ Long-term learning experience contributed to the richness of learning, experience
- ❖ Program prepared participants for not just teaching, but a career in academia
- ❖ Program is not right for all PhDs and selection is important for Scholar/program success.