



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

ACADEMY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Called to Teach: Brief Essays on the Meaning of Teaching



That Good Old Baylor Line: Baylor's Vision for Teaching Development

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In the late 1970s, William F. “Bill” Cooper, Professor of Philosophy and Dean of Faculty Development, assisted by Elizabeth “Betsy” Vardaman, applied for and received a grant from the Lilly Foundation to pilot a faculty development program they named the Summer Teaching Institute.¹ Robert M. “Bob” Baird, Professor of Philosophy, convened the first group of Institute participants in 1978.² Cooper, Vardaman, and Baird, inspirational and beloved teachers themselves, recognized a need for instructors to think and talk together about how to design, organize, and teach their courses. Cooper’s immediate aim, he tells me, was for faculty participants to write syllabi for their courses, which, believe it or not, was an uncommon practice at Baylor in the sixties and seventies. Thanks to their initiative, teaching development at Baylor was born.³ Thanks to their

¹ Dr. William F. Cooper has been affiliated with Baylor University for fifty-three years. Cooper also became supportive of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core in its early years and provided funding for BIC faculty development through his dean’s office discretionary account. He continues to advocate for teaching development.

² Baird served as Summer Teaching Institute leader for several years before transitioning to facilitator of the “microteaching” component of the Institute, a role he performed for approximately thirty years.

³ The STI/SFI is now a fixture of the University and the Academy for Teaching and Learning. Former and current leaders, based on available records, include the following: Bill Cooper, Bob Baird, Fred Curtis (deceased), Gustavo Morales, Bert Williams, Paul Rosewell, A.A. Hyden (deceased), James Nowlin, Tom Proctor (deceased), Jeter Basden, Tom Hanks, Anne-Marie Schultz, Laine Scales, Lenore Wright, Andy Arterbury, and Keith Schubert.

vision—a vision to guide That Good Old Baylor Line—teaching development has been institutionalized.

Even before teaching development was integrated formally into institutional structures, Baylor proudly proclaimed a tradition of excellence in education. A recent survey of Baylor alumni indicates that “most alumni recall the quality of the education at the university when asked about what comes to mind about Baylor.”⁴ Scores of our predecessors shouldered significant responsibility for creating and maintaining quality education, Cooper, Vardaman, and Baird among them. We could not be where we are without their work and example.⁵ Baird, who served forty-seven years on the faculty and received the highest honor for teaching, the designation of Master Teacher, reiterated his advocacy for teaching development in an April 2014 interview: “I take teaching so seriously that to be called a Master Teacher is greatly appreciated...though I don’t think of myself as a “master teacher.’ I think of myself as a student of good teaching—I try always to improve my teaching.”⁶

Herbert Reynolds, Baylor President from 1981 to 1995, championed efforts to make teaching a priority. In the first five years of his administration, he established the Distinguished Visiting Professors Program and authorized the Robert Foster Cherry Great Teacher Award. In 1982, he created the designation of Baylor professors as Master Teachers.⁷ D. Thomas “Tom” Hanks (English) heeded the call to excellence and dedicated himself to evidence-based, inspirational teaching throughout his forty-one-year career (Hanks won every teaching award Baylor offers). In 1982, Hanks was tapped to take over directorship of the Summer Teaching Institute, subsequently renamed the Summer Faculty Institute. He served as an SFI director and its key advocate for thirty-five years, retiring from the SFI and Baylor in 2017.⁸

⁴ The 2012 alumni survey is available at the following URL: <https://www.baylor.edu/alumni/doc.php/193441.pdf>

⁵ Cooper subsequently became Dean of Arts & Sciences and Professor of Philosophy, *Emeritus*. Vardaman now serves as Associate Dean for Engaged Learning in A & S and Senior Lecturer in English. Baird served as Chair of the Department of Philosophy for eighteen years (1987-2005), University Ombudsperson, and Faculty Senator. Baird also directed a university self-study from 1984 to 86 and chaired the committee that developed the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core (BIC) in the early 1990s. He earned the designation of Master Teacher and received the Piper Professor of Texas Award, the Robert L. Reid Award for Outstanding Teaching in the Humanities, the Herbert H. Reynolds Award for Exemplary Service to Students, and the Cornelia Marshall Smith Professor of the Year Award. Baird is now Professor of Philosophy and Master Teacher, *Emeritus*.

⁶ The complete interview with Baird is available at the following URL: <http://blogs.baylor.edu/artsandsciences/2014/04/23/robert-baird/>

⁷ <https://www.baylor.edu/MEDIACOMMUNICATIONS/news.php?action=story&story=45872>

⁸ Hanks’ lessons will endure in the faculty participants he mentored, many of whom, like me, cannot think of SFI without thinking of Tom Hanks. For more about Tom’s career, please visit <https://www2.baylor.edu/baylorproud/2017/07/remembering-dr-pennington-dr-hanks-as-they-retire/>

The founding of the Academy for Teaching and Learning (ATL) in 2008 has bolstered Baylor's tradition of educational excellence. You may be surprised to learn that at the time of the ATL's founding, Baylor was the only university of the Big XII Conference that lacked an established center for teaching and learning. University leaders recognized that increasing student enrollment, fluctuating student retention, expanding numbers of faculty, deepening investments in research, and the need for greater accountability for institutional effectiveness compelled Baylor to formalize support for faculty and ensure the continuation of transformational teaching. This resolve has ensured that our faculty and student body continue to see effective teaching as foundational to our students' significant learning, moral development, and spiritual growth. Thanks to the University's commitment, as well as extensive faculty engagement, the ATL has become a vital mechanism for the ongoing development of Baylor instructors. It is also a tangible expression—to alumni, potential students and faculty, and other stakeholders—of the institution's on-going recognition that teaching excellence is a way of life at Baylor.

Virtually every university constituency endorsed the strategic proposal for the creation of the ATL.⁹ Jon Engelhardt, former dean of the School of Education, believed so strongly in the proposed center's value that he offered funding from his own budget to help launch it. Larry Lyon, Senior Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, authorized stipend funds to create the ATL's Graduate Fellows program. Former Provost Elizabeth Davis, convinced that the time had come for a center for teaching and learning, presented the proposal to the Board of Regents, who approved the ATL for operation beginning in 2008. W. Gardner Campbell, Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success and Associate Professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University, served as the inaugural director of the ATL from 2008 to 2011. Campbell encouraged Baylor faculty to re-imagine what great teaching might look like in a digital age. Today, members of the Office of the President and Office of the Provost, directors, deans, chairpersons, and other campus leaders champion the work of the ATL and find ways to integrate teaching development into the fabric of Baylor. Perhaps most significantly, Baylor faculty have taken ownership over the ATL, investing their expertise, time, and energy to breathe life into the ATL's mission "to support and inspire a flourishing community of learning." I am immensely grateful.

The strategic proposal identified a need for faculty members, departments, and program leaders to have a central resource to help develop meaningful and effective long-term plans for enhancing student learning. Research supports the belief that efforts made on behalf of effective teaching development need infrastructure, resources, and integration into institutional systems. A multi-year study published in 2015 concludes that faculty involvement in centers for teaching and learning depends on "whether or not the centers are integrated systematically into the expectations, support,

⁹ Deans, department chairs, the Faculty Senate, the Graduate Student Association, Student Congress, and individual professors and students alike declared in agreement: Baylor needs a university-wide venue that will promote a standard of excellence in teaching and foster significant learning among students.

and reward structures of the institution, and whether this emphasis on teaching excellence is reflected in the level of respect it is accorded by peers.”¹⁰

I believe that whatever future mechanisms exist for teacher support, great teaching and significant learning will endure. Why? I believe Baylor is loyal to her core values, including teaching. But my faith in the future of teaching is rooted in something that is both more elusive and more palpable: That Good Old Baylor Line. Since 1845, generations of Baylor students and teachers have marched together in and out of classrooms. These students and teachers, supported by dedicated academic leaders, have forged a bold vision that unites Baylor’s historic tradition of teaching excellence with a renewed commitment to teaching development, a vision realized in the Academy for Teaching and Learning. Sometimes, we need to fling our Green and Gold far *and* near. Sometimes, we teachers, like our students, need transformation as we hold that Good Old Baylor Line.

¹⁰ Lyon, J. S., Gettman, H. J., Roberts, S. P., & Shaw, C. E. (2015). Measuring and improving the climate for teaching: A multi-year study. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 26 (1), 111-138, 127.