

## **“In retrospect, I recognize it as a significant turning point”: A graduate student-centered assessment of a Preparing Future Faculty program**

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### **Abstract**

Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs provide pedagogical training and experiences to promote graduate student professional development. We conducted a study of PFF Fellows’ experiences about their year of teaching between 2005 and 2020 and subsequent career trajectory. This is particularly interesting as Fellows have a variety of experiences while teaching in-person at one of seven collaborating host institutions before graduating and pursuing a career. Using a mixed methods survey ( $n = 54$ ), we provide a student-centered assessment of program goals across 15 annual cohorts from a home institution classified as large, Midwestern, and public. Descriptive and thematic analysis of responses revealed five themes suggesting that PFF experiences have positive outcomes for graduate students’ academic career development. As our methodological goal was to center graduate student voices, we have provided several narratives that illustrate the diversity of experiences across the years. We discuss the implications of these findings as important considerations for the

creation of similar programs designed to support graduate student development as future faculty.

**Keywords:** future faculty programs, graduate student development, program assessment

Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs help doctoral students become familiar with the realities of faculty life in intensive research, teaching, and service at a variety of institution types (Austin, 2002; DeNeef, 2002; Wurgler et al., 2014). Though Fellows may have teaching experience in their home institution, the allure of a PFF program with host institutions is that Fellows get additional experience at a dissimilar institution before seeking full-time employment. Pedagogical development is a major component of PFF programs to ensure graduate students receive training that prepares them as excellent educators (Adams, 2002; Fleet et al., 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001).

Because of the ability to gain teaching experience at another institution, PFF participants are more likely to acquire a faculty position, use effective teaching practices, and feel competent in the classroom (Connolly et al., 2016, 2018). In existing studies of PFF programs, alumni report that meaningful experiences of their PFF programs included pedagogical development, professionalization for the academy, and institutional support and mentoring (Frey et al., 2020; Vergara et al., 2014; Wurgler et al., 2014). However, the literature lacks empirical studies of program efficacy regarding career outcomes of PFF alumni and their views of the value of the PFF experiences (Diggs et al., 2017; Ferren et al., 2002).

This article addresses the challenge of preparing graduate students from one institution to teach in a variety of contexts before graduation and entry into the job market. This challenge is made more difficult as our Fellows are heterogeneous in both discipline and instructional experience and will head to different host institutions for their fellowship year. Additionally, while Fellows are teaching at the host

institutions, uniform and supportive experiences with faculty mentors cannot be guaranteed. Lastly, our training pushes against the prioritization of graduate instructors as institutional resources to emphasize individual professional rewards.

Here we contribute to the PFF program assessment literature with a study of graduate student experiences in the Future Faculty Teaching Fellowship (FFTF) program at a large, 4-year, public, research university in the Midwest. The purpose of this study is to understand participants' perceptions of how program components contributed toward their identity development, professional preparation, and career achievement as educators.

Our data starts in 2005, at the start of our program and persists through several changes in governmental stakeholders, administrations, and economic recessions. It is our hope that those involved with graduate student development can be informed of the methods we used to assess our program, the value of such a graduate training program to graduate students' future careers and institutions, and the kinds of training required for graduate instructors to make the most of a PFF program.

## **Future Faculty Teaching Fellowship (FFTF) Conception and Goals**

In 1997, the FFTF program was created with funds from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to address concerns that graduate school was not appropriately preparing students for faculty positions outside of research-intensive institutions. The program, based on the main residential campus, utilized a faculty steering committee that included members from the seven regional campuses. The first 14 Fellows from 13 graduate programs taught at six regional campuses in the 1998–1999 academic year.

Given the myriad differences between the campuses in which Fellows teach, FFTF program objectives outline key personal and professional benefits for participants. The program has since evolved to include five goals for each Fellow: (1) teach established courses and, in some cases, develop new ones; (2) be prepared to teach in new academic settings; (3) teach and experience faculty life in a different academic setting to enhance career preparation; (4) experience life as a faculty member (attend meetings and other departmental activities); and (5) participate in the faculty life at the host campus. This is the first long-term empirical study of participants' narratives about their experiences both within and subsequent to the FFTF program.

## **Description of FFTF Program and Experience**

Today, the University Graduate School administers the program in coordination with the host campuses' departments and liaisons. The preparation of future faculty experience begins with the application, which is meant to mimic academic job application expectations, and includes the submission of a teaching statement and teaching portfolio documenting their pedagogical preparation, teaching experiences, and instructional effectiveness. Faculty liaisons at host institutions consider the candidates' applications as they would other candidates for teaching roles on their campuses. The training process begins at the home institution with a pedagogy course and the Summer Institute. The Summer Institute is coordinated by host institution faculty to help Fellows navigate necessary pedagogical changes when faced with different campus demographics. Then, Fellows spend a year at the host campus where they teach courses, receive mentorship from host faculty, participate in professional development workshops, and contribute to faculty life.

During the fellowship, Fellows teach two classes each semester "in residence" at partner, regional, and urban campuses of the two major public universities and a private university in our state. While the regional campuses of the university system have continued to serve as host campuses, additional institutions have occasionally participated in the program, including regional private universities and a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The most successful cross-institution collaboration has been with a private undergraduate liberal arts intensive institution located one hour away. These institutions have different missions and student demographics than the graduate students' home research-intensive university. Host campuses assign a faculty mentor who is charged with ensuring that Fellows are included in department meetings, visiting the Fellows' classes, and offering insight into faculty life.

### ***Key Operational Components of the FFTF Program***

Here, we describe the financial and operational commitments that contribute to the FFTF program's success. A program director in the graduate school coordinates the multiple components of the program and engages in dialogue with graduate academic programs to build trust, interest, and communication among prospective graduate students, academic program staff, and faculty mentors. The program director also provides data about program outcomes including time-to-degree and post-PhD career data to address common concerns about graduation delays and employability. A program manager in the graduate school addresses day-to-day activities, including the application process, fellowship contracts, and coordination with host campus liaisons. A pedagogy specialist in the teaching and learning center assists with teaching preparation activities. The graduate school provides competitive fellowship stipends and moving costs to the Fellows. Each host institution has responsibilities to the program as well, described on the program website and in a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

These responsibilities are coordinated between the program manager and a host campus liaison. The host institution ensures the availability of two courses per semester for the Fellow, a teaching salary at a minimum rate per course at the visiting faculty rank, an assigned faculty mentor, and access to typical faculty resources.

## Research Questions

Considering the program's expense and intensive time-in-residence, we wanted to establish the value and importance participants place on the FFTF program, how the program nurtured them personally and professionally, and the experiences that mattered most for graduate students and their early faculty career success. In this article, we share with graduate student developers, program directors, and graduate deans the results of a mixed methods study of former FFTF participants' experiences and outcomes to answer these two research questions:

1. Did the program have intended academic career outcomes for participants?
2. How did aspects of the FFTF program contribute to participants' academic career development?

## Methods

Targeting FFT Fellows between 2005 and 2020, we created a survey to solicit quantitative and qualitative responses in four areas of interest: (1) the effect, if any, of FFTF on respondents' careers; (2) preparatory activities for the FFTF application process; (3) respondents' program experiences; and (4) feedback on the quality of the experience. All quantitative items were measured on a five-point Likert scale with

1 indicating a low value and 5 indicating a high value (see Lam et al., 2023, for survey questions). We enriched the survey data with two additional sources: institutional data for comparison in career outcomes and longer, written narratives from the survey respondents on invitation.

### **Recruitment and Sample**

Following IRB guidelines at our institution (IRB #2002349860), all former Fellows who participated in the FFTF between 2005 and 2020 ( $n = 176$ ) were recruited by email using publicly available contact information. We received 54 full responses—a response rate of 30.7%. Additionally, to enrich our data, we solicited narratives from survey respondents by asking “Did you have a particularly illuminating experience during your FFTF? We’d love to consider it as part of a peer-reviewed publication on the FFTF program. We envision including narratives by current and past Fellows as part of this publication, which would result in co-authorship of the article.” Eighteen former Fellows responded positively. We selected four past Fellows (Co-authors 4, 5, 6, 7) to submit narratives by prioritizing diversity in current institutions, positions, disciplines, and time since being a Fellow.

The demographic characteristics by gender and race are described in Table 1. A little over half of the respondents (60.9%,  $n = 39$ ) completed their degrees between 2009 and 2018. There was a relatively even distribution of selections for women ( $n = 21$ ), men ( $n = 25$ ), with an additional five selecting no response. There were respondents who identified as nonbinary ( $n = 2$ ) and one who wrote in “Female-to-Male transgender” ( $n = 1$ ). Most respondents identified as white or Caucasian without Latine or Hispanic origin ( $n = 37$ ), while smaller samples self-identified as white with Latine or Hispanic origin ( $n = 2$ ), Latine ( $n = 2$ ), white with Middle Eastern origin ( $n = 2$ ), Asian ( $n = 2$ ), and Black ( $n = 1$ ). Seven participants chose not to respond to this question.

The gender characteristics of our survey respondents are similar to our campus’s graduate student population in 2021, which slightly underrepresents women (46% female). However, our respondent sample overrepresents white graduate students, who are about 50% of our campus’s graduate student population, and substantially underrepresents our campus’s population of Asian (6.8%), Black (4.6%), and Latine (6.2%) graduate students (University Institutional Research and Reporting, 2021).

**Analysis**

Analysis of the responses occurred in two phases: descriptive statistics and categorization of qualitative responses. Excel pivot tables provided a descriptive view of the intersections of gender and racial/ethnic identities with career outcomes for all 54 respondents (Table 1).

**Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Survey Participants and Career Decisions**

	Higher education		K-12 education		Nonprofit		Self-employed		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
<b>Gender</b>	51	94.44	1	0.02	1	0.02	1	0.02	54	100
Female	20	37.03	1	0.02	0	0	0	0	21	38.89
Male	22	40.74	0	0	1	0.02	1	0.02	24	44.44
Nonbinary	2	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
FTM	1	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.02
Declined response	6	11.11	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	11.11
<b>Race</b>	51	94.44	1	0.02	1	0.02	1	0.02	54	100
Asian	2	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
Black	1	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.02
Latine	2	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
White/Caucasian	34	62.96	1	0.02	1	0.02	1	0.02	37	68.51
White, Middle Eastern	2	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
White, Latine, or Hispanic	2	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
Declined response	8	14.81	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	14.81



Qualitative responses in which respondents explained their FFTF experiences were thematically organized separately by two authors (Authors 1 and 3). We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis: (1) read all textual responses in the survey; (2) create surface-level codes for each response; (3) collate the codes into themes that describe trends in the entire data set; (4) collaboratively review all themes; (5) define and name themes; and (6) write final report. The same two researchers (Authors 1 and 3) coded participant responses separately and met to discuss divergences until resolution to provide inter-researcher reliability (Lattuca & Domagal-Goldman, 2007).

## Results

### ***Career Placements: FFTF Participants Are More Likely to Hold Teaching-Focused Jobs in Higher Education Than Non-participants***

A primary motivation for launching the program was graduate students' concern with their level of preparation for academic jobs outside of research-intensive institutions. We compared academic career outcomes of FFTF participants with PhD graduates at the same institution who had not participated in the program. Based on institutional data on career outcomes obtained from Academic Analytics (2022), 47.7% ( $n = 84$ ) of the 176 FFTF participants are employed at 4-year academic institutions (Table 2). In comparison, 53% ( $n = 2,587$ ) of the 4,873 PhD graduates from 2006–2020 from the same institution are employed at a 4-year academic institution. FFTF participants were more likely to be employed by either master's colleges (30.7%) or baccalaureate colleges (15.9%), when compared to their non-FFTF counterparts (18% and 10.2%, respectively). Furthermore, FFTF participants were less likely to be employed at academic institutions with high or very high research activity (47.7%), in comparison with PhD graduates from the same institution in the same period who did not participate in the program (67.6%).

**Table 2. Job Placement of FFTF and Non-FFTF PhD Graduates at Home Institution**

	FFTF participants		Non-FFTF participants	
	Count	%	Count	%
<b>Education Job Placement</b>	88	50	2,637	54.1
<i>Four-year college or university</i>	84	47.7	2,587	53.1
Doctoral universities	42	23.9	1,782	36.6
Master's colleges & universities	27	15.3	478	9.8
Baccalaureate colleges	14	8.0	270	5.5
Special focus 4-year: arts, music & design schools	1	0.6	53	1.1
<i>Community college</i>	4	2.3	50	1.0
<b>Non-Education Job Placement</b>	88	50	2,236	45.9
Total	176	100.0	4,873	100.0

Of the 54 survey participants in this study, 63% ( $n = 34$ ) were tenure-track faculty, and 24% ( $n = 13$ ) were non-tenure-track faculty. Four individuals (7.4%) worked outside of higher education: one each in K–12 education, at a nonprofit (unspecified field), in an engineering school, and as self-employed.

Although respondents indicated this experience was helpful for them in gaining academic positions, it is also pertinent to note that the fellowship helped some participants make other career realizations. We include the following narrative as an example of this, as we believe any participant making a career decision based on their FFTF experience to be a success. One of our co-authors, Helen Hathorn (FFT Fellow 2005–2006) provided a narrative at our invitation; they realized they did not want to pursue academia during their fellowship:

Currently, I teach French at one of the premier independent schools in metro Atlanta, where I have been since August 2016. To be frank, I love my job. I know that I was hired for it specifically thanks to my experience tutoring students with learning differences, experience that I would not have earned had I remained in academia.

I had accepted the FFTF eagerly for the funding opportunity it provided so that I could write my dissertation. . . . I got myself into a rigorous daily routine of teaching prep and dissertation work. While I had expected to begin writing and grinding out that project, I found myself ABD but disinterested in my research, horribly unmotivated and, honestly, clinically depressed over it. My classes, however, were going extremely well! . . . Ironically, I discerned a more fundamental interest in teaching and ultimately chose to abandon my academic research altogether about a year later. That decision was by no means easy for me, nor even immediate, but in retrospect I recognize it as a significant turning point. . . . While teaching was often important to me, especially as I developed my skills in grad school, I would not have found my passion for it had I not been forced to innovate so much thanks to the FFTF experience. That year pushed me to take intellectual risks and to become more comfortable with my failures (hands down, the best teacher for anyone).

### ***Contributions of the FFTF Program to Participants' Academic Career Development***

Here, we share survey results where FFTF participants reflected on aspects of the program that mattered most for their academic career development: application process, preparatory activities, teaching experiences, and mentoring.

#### *Applying for the Fellowship*

Because the FFTF application is treated as an application for teaching positions at host institutions, we asked about the resources and barriers that Fellows faced in this first step in the PFF experience. Over one-third (37%) of respondents did not seek any help on their FFTF applications. Sixty-three percent ( $n = 19$ ) who used at least one source indicated that past FFTF participants were one of their

sources of assistance, and 44% ( $n = 15$ ) who used at least one source selected their graduate advisor as one of their resources. These resources helped applicants decipher what host institutions needed, decide what to include in their portfolios, and polish their applications. Applicants found it helpful to see previous applications and to hear directly from past Fellows “what they felt their departments looked for or needed from possible FFTFs.” These connections with previous Fellows occurred through informal peer networks. While most respondents did not recall having trouble completing the application, a couple respondents wanted more instruction on applying and guidance on what the host institutions were looking for. One respondent said, “previous participants provided all the help I needed. That labor should not fall to peers & friends, there should be more formal access to materials through FFTF.” In addition, another respondent said, “Because I didn’t know much about the regional campuses, it was hard to envision what they would need most and what kinds of students I will be teaching.” Of the application process, a couple respondents remarked that this was the first time they had applied for an academic job or that they appreciated that the application process mimicked the expectations of academic job applications.

### *Preparing for the Fellowship Experience*

We were curious about the Fellows’ perceived value of required training experiences in preparing them for positive fellowship experiences (Table 3). Prior teaching experience, the Summer Institute and a pedagogy course are mandatory before starting the fellowship, while teaching development with the teaching center is optional. Fellows were overwhelmingly positive about the helpfulness of their previous teaching experience in preparing them for their roles, with over 90% of respondents giving that activity choice the rating of “helpful” or “somewhat helpful.” Over half found the Summer Institute helpful or somewhat helpful for their fellowship preparation, with one participant explaining, “It allowed me to network and to establish

**Table 3. Ratings of Preparatory Experiences to Teach at Fellows' Host Institutions (n = 54)**

	Teaching experience at [home institution]		Summer Institute		Teaching development with teaching center		Coursework in pedagogy	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Helpful	47	87.0	17	31.5	14	25.9	18	33.3
Somewhat helpful	5	9.5	16	29.6	13	24.0	13	24.0
Neither helpful nor not helpful	0	0	5	9.3	2	3.7	7	13.0
Somewhat not helpful	0	0	4	7.4	1	1.9	2	3.7
Not helpful	0	0	1	1.9	1	1.9	3	6.0
Not applicable	2	3.7	11	20.4	23	42.6	11	20.4
No response	0	0	0	0	1	1.9	0	0
Average rating	4.9		4.7		4.2		4.0	

Note. Averages obtained from items that used a 5-point Likert Scale where 5= Helpful and 1 = Not Helpful.

relationships with other Fellows who would be at other campuses. The most helpful sessions were the ones that explained the difference between students at [home institution] and at a 'commuter' campus." Working with the teaching center was optional, as indicated by over 40% of respondents marking the teaching center as not applicable to their preparation for their teaching fellowship. Eighty-seven percent of those who sought help from the teaching center rated the interactions positively. The teaching center has historically provided coaching to graduate students about teaching statements, summaries of course evaluations, and sample syllabi, components of the FFTF application. Over half of the respondents shared that their program's pedagogy course was helpful or somewhat helpful preparation.

### *Fellowship Experiences and Achievement of Program Goals*

In reflecting on the program's stated goals, respondents agreed that the program was effective academic career preparation to teach new and established courses in a different setting (Table 4). While the average responses across these questions were overall very positive,

**Table 4. Respondents' Ratings of Achievement of Stated FFTF Program Goals (n = 54)**

	Teach established courses and, in some cases, develop new ones	Be prepared to teach in new academic settings	Teach and experience faculty life in a different academic setting to enhance career preparation	Experience life as a faculty member (attend faculty meetings and other departmental activities)	Participate in the faculty life at the host campus
Response average	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.0	3.8

Note. Averages obtained from items that used a 5-point Likert Scale where 5= Valuable and 1 = Not Valuable.

respondents gave comparatively lower marks to the program's achievement of an immersive faculty life experience.

Researchers organized qualitative responses into five themes that captured participants' experiences. Responses indicated myriad beneficial outcomes for Fellows' lives. A small number indicated poor experiences stemming from lack of support from host institutions or absent faculty mentors. First, participants discussed their broader perspective, instructional skillset, and greater love of teaching that resulted from working with new student populations and in a different institutional culture (Theme 1). Respondents overwhelmingly remarked how teaching one's own course was a clear asset to developing pedagogy from the ground up and/or helping them seek full-time academic positions (Theme 2). One commonality resided in the positive impact of mentorship at the host institution on Fellows' experiences (Theme 3). Respondents commented on the insight gained about faculty role and power in university and departmental governance (Theme 4). Finally, Fellows stated how FFTF gave them realistic views of their role as faculty, which subsequently influenced their career choices (Theme 5). Below, we include responses to survey questions that represent each theme.

**Theme 1: FFT Fellows Broadened Their Teaching Perspectives by Working With New Students and in Different Institutions.** Most Fellows rated all experiences related to teaching practice at their host

institution as somewhat valuable to valuable (Table 5). These experiences included teaching students at a different institution with a unique demographic makeup, the item with the highest rating in this group. An open-ended question in the survey section "Perceived Value of Experiences Related to Teaching Practice" was "What was the most important thing you gained from the FFTF experience?" More than two-thirds (68.5%,  $n = 37$ ) cited the impact of teaching experience on their job placement success.

On student demographics, one Fellow teaching at an institution with majority of traditional-aged students valued the experience of teaching non-traditional students. They wrote, "Their life experiences enriched the classroom encounter because it felt like most, not all, were there for discernible reasons." Another remarked on the need to change teaching strategies due to a new institution: "You get to know the students in different ways, and because the educational culture is so different, they also approach their work differently too. [Host institution] gave me a better sense of how to operate in a private, liberal arts school compared to a giant state school."

Two other Fellows credited FFTF for giving opportunities that awakened their love of teaching and developed their pedagogy. The difference in student populations raised a degree of criticality in one Fellow's pedagogy, ultimately capturing their delight in teaching: "I discovered that I actually enjoy teaching. Prior to FFTF, I used to say that I am only in this field to do research. That was no longer how I felt afterwards."

**Theme 2: FFT Fellows Received Beneficial Experience in Teaching One's Own Course.** Respondents indicated that teaching a course of their own design was more valuable (average score of 4.8/5 among 48 respondents) than teaching an established course (average of 4.5/5 among 40 respondents) (Table 5). The qualitative responses expanded our understanding of the impact of teaching one's own course on pedagogical development, job market preparation, and continued use of teaching skills.

Many respondents commented about their pedagogical development and subsequent success on the job market, but engagement in

**Table 5. Perceived Value of Experiences Related to Teaching Practice (n = 54)**

	Teaching in a different student context		Teaching a course of your own design		Teaching an established course		Teaching mentorship by faculty	
	Count	Avg.	Count	Avg.	Count	Avg.	Count	Avg.
Respondents	52	4.9	48	4.8	40	4.5	50	3.8
Not applicable	2	-	4	-	8	-	3	-
No response	0	-	2	-	6	-	1	-

Note. Averages obtained from items that used a 5-point Likert Scale where 5= Valuable and 1 = Not Valuable.

designing, planning, and executing a course was particularly meaningful. One Fellow wrote, “FFTF also provided me with my own courses that I taught over the course of the academic year, giving me the chance to refine my teaching.” Another participant reflected that teaching their own course was “useful when I went out into the job market to set me apart in terms of my experience.” Yet another stated that their experience teaching their own course helped them “feel comfortable shifting to a full-time faculty member.” A fourth individual shared that they still use the skills today: “[I was] given the freedom to design my own service learning course that was connected to the community where I taught. [This] was an experience that I continue to draw on.”

One of our co-authors, Aybike Tezel (FFT Fellow 2019–2020), explained the benefits of creating their own class and developing a teaching community in the following solicited narrative:

[Host Institution 3] did more than just giving me the opportunity to teach my own classes. . . . The supportive and collegial work environment at the Department of History and Anthropology helped me take responsibility, make independent decisions but also feel confident about appealing to more experienced colleagues for help whenever I needed it. I learnt how to deal with a cheating student, how best to be helpful for a student with disability, and how to point the students to the most suitable resources when they struggled. When we moved classes online during the pandemic, for as much as I regretted not having the ability to teach in a physical classroom, I enjoyed learning from



the challenges of this new way of teaching which I had never experienced before. . . .

I am in the job market and finishing up my dissertation to embark upon a new chapter in my life this year. While applying for various academic jobs in the U.S. and abroad, the skills and experience that I gained during my fellowship proved to be an important asset. I use the syllabi of the courses that I taught at [Host Institution 3] as my signature classes in my portfolio. Student evaluations I gathered at [Host Institution 3] are the most important testimonies to my strengths as a teacher and I rely on them to reflect on my teaching. My mentor's recommendation letters speak to a part of my professional personality that neither of my dissertation advisors can really talk about. All in all, my applications are now stronger and diversified than ever thanks to the year I spent at [Host Institution 3] as a future faculty teaching fellow.

**Theme 3: Collegiality and Mentorship Were Crucial to Positive FTF Experiences.** The third theme highlighted how the quality of Fellows' experiences hinged on the collegiality in their host institution. Respondents said that quality of the mentoring relationship had a large impact on their professional development and how integrated they felt at the institution. While some Fellows had very positive experiences with their faculty mentors, others (13%) rated their mentorship experiences substantially lower than direct teaching experiences.

One Fellow found immense value in the mentorship experience, writing "working alongside full-time faculty in your field who are anywhere from 10–30+ years ahead of you career-wise and getting their perspective, their mentoring, and wisdom over your teaching and research/anything else is priceless." Another Fellow noted, "I learned a lot about how important the maintenance of positive faculty/administrative communication could be. Most importantly, I learned the importance of a strong, supportive, involved, congenial department that \*enjoy\* working together." A third Fellow wrote how mentors helped them to "speak intelligently to search committees about how I could participate in faculty life on campus."

Most negative mentorship experiences pertain to absent faculty, contributing to low engagement from Fellows. Some felt that they could not participate in faculty experiences without invitation; others were unaware of faculty experiences due to lack of mentorship. One participant wrote that they did not participate in faculty life much, wishing that they “had been encouraged and invited to engage in faculty experiences more.” Some Fellows found positive outcomes from absent mentors. One of these Fellows wrote that “the sense of needing to find my own way was for me good preparation” for faculty life.

While it is necessary to give attention to the challenges and/or lack of mentorship from this fellowship, we also want to highlight how at its best, this mentorship can serve as a teaching community. In the following solicited narrative, Matthew G. Stanard (FFT Fellow 2005–2006), explains their role in asking for guidance:

During the year I was a Fellow in the FFTF program, I landed a tenure-track job at a small, liberal arts-plus college. Not only had I never heard of the school before, I’d never taught at or attended a college of its kind or size, meaning I was embarking on unfamiliar terrain. But my experience as a fellow at [Host Institution 4] gave me important tools to successfully navigate my new environment, including a key lesson: the importance of reaching out to more experienced colleagues for guidance and listening when they offered it. The experience of asking questions, leaning on veteran colleagues for their expertise, and—perhaps most importantly—listening to their guidance has served me well ever since. . . . These colleagues were a treasure trove of knowledge and good advice, in particular my mentors, who had tremendous teaching experience. Their differing approaches toward the classroom and their views about and mindsets toward teaching goals and methods were enlightening. Students at [Host Institution 4] spanned a spectrum from those who were truly exceptional to others who struggled to produce satisfactory university-level work. My mentors reminded me that it was a perennial challenge in larger courses to strike a balance between pushing the most capable students to do their best

while not losing others who were less interested in or less prepared for college work. My mentors rightly advised me of the frequent family, work, health, and other "life" issues that interfered with students' studies at [Host Institution 4], and months of on-site experience taught me to have more empathy for students' lives outside of their university studies. . . .

Now a full professor at [profession institution], I continue to draw on my colleagues' varied experience to navigate each academic year. Last year, in the era of covid and Canvas—when so much was shifted to the college's online learning system—I had to deal with a couple cases of plagiarism unlike anything I'd seen before. Pausing before acting and asking experienced colleagues for their input helped me figure out how to proceed. Considering that students are individuals, that technology is ever changing, and that no two courses are ever the same, I plan to continue to benefit from the lessons I learned as a FFTF as my teaching career unfolds.

**Theme 4: FFTF Fellows Gained Understanding on the Role of Faculty in Governance.** In a complementary vein to the themes above, participants noted that FFTF facilitated their experience of the unique responsibility of faculty governance. Most Fellows rated all items related to academic career preparation as somewhat valuable to valuable (Table 6). In this theme, Fellows noted that the most useful experiences were participating in faculty life, joining faculty meetings, participating in departmental committees, and witnessing decision-making.

One participant said it was "revelatory" to get a peek behind closed doors: "Department faculty meetings were wonderful; the full-faculty meetings (while not required for me to attend) were awful" because of interpersonal dynamics. Another wrote, "FFTF taught me how to be a savvy navigator of conflict among faculty, about how the administration and faculty might wield power in different ways, which paid off in future settings." A third participant noted the job market advantage of

**Table 6. Perceived Value of Experiences Related to Academic Career Preparation (n = 54)**

Experiences related to academic career preparation	Joining faculty meetings	Witnessing or participating in institutional governance or department decisions	Participating in faculty life	Interacting with other Fellows in the FFTF	Career mentorship by faculty
Average (number)	4.5 (22)	4.4 (18)	4.3 (40)	3.8 (38)	3.7 (44)
Percentage (number) not applicable	31.5 (17)	35.2 (19)	14.8 (8)	16.7 (9)	11.1 (6)
Percentage (number) not responding	27.8 (15)	31.5 (17)	11.1 (6)	13.0 (7)	7.4 (4)

Note. Averages obtained from items that used a 5-point Likert Scale where 5= Valuable and 1 = Not Valuable.

knowing how power works in different departmental makeups: “It was also really important for me to see the differences in how programs work when they’re composed of multiple affiliate faculty rather than a department with several lines. There are lots of insights in relation to this point that were crucial in my job search.” Central to this theme were comments on how glimpses into the less-visible aspects of faculty life were especially useful to understanding demands on faculty time, since administrative skillsets are often external to many graduate assistantships.

**Theme 5: Realistic Glimpses Into Faculty Life Prepared FFT Fellows for Careers.** FFTF continued to have an impact on participants after their fellowship, particularly while on the job market and as junior faculty. Survey responses indicate that the strengths of the FFTF experience reside in the active roles that Fellows take at their host institutions pertaining to faculty life (average score of 4.5/5 among 22 respondents) and governance (average score of 4.4/5 among 18 respondents) (Table 6). However, more than half of our survey participants either did not respond or marked “not applicable” to these two items, presumably because they did not participate in faculty meetings or faculty governance, a key goal of the FFTF program.

Mentorship (average score of 3.7/5 among 44 respondents) and peer interactions (average score of 3.8/5 among 38 respondents) appear to be the weakest among all items related to career preparation shown by mixed experiences. Since immersion in faculty life is a major goal of the program and an explicit function of host mentors is to encourage or enable, these activities need further consideration in our program design and expectation setting.

Sub-themes included (1) how experiences during the program helped participants mentally and emotionally prepare for faculty life and (2) how experience as "faculty" gave Fellows an advantage on the job market. One individual discussed how FFTF helped them gain confidence as a faculty member "rather than as a graduate student whose contributions were typically overlooked." Another participant noted how "faculty responsibilities . . . were extremely helpful as I applied for future jobs." Participating in faculty life can provide greater insight not only into the life of an academic but also into hiring practices. In the following narrative, Julie Eyink (FFT Fellow 2018–2019) explains how their fellowship helped them understand and tailor their future job presentations:

One of the most formative experiences during my fellowship was seeing the "other side" of a liberal arts search committee before I went on the market! . . . Specifically, at [home institution], we often would have interviewees give talks to audiences of PhD students and faculty members. These talks would be VERY fast paced and contain multiple sets of studies. Even as a 5th-year student, I remember getting lost easily—and the pace really didn't allow time for questions until the end, at which point I was completely checked out! In contrast, successful applicants at [Host Institution 2] knew to tailor their talks to an undergrad audience instead of the faculty. In conversations with my mentor and the search committee later, we discussed how the department wouldn't want to hire someone who couldn't communicate well with undergrads and who the undergrads didn't have an interest in working with—since they would be the ones working in the lab!

Because of these experiences, I made sure to treat my research talk as almost another teaching demonstration and to actively involve activities and ask questions to keep the students engaged with my research. Without this fellowship, I would have played to the faculty during my talk instead of focusing on the students—and this very well might have prevented me from getting a job! By spending a year at an institution vastly different than [home institution], I was able to gain first-hand knowledge of what teaching-focused institutions look for during interviews and this gave me an invaluable leg-up on the job market the next year.

## Discussion

The goal of the FFTF program is to prepare advanced graduate students for academic jobs. This study was guided by two questions: Does the FFTF program support intended academic career outcomes for participants? And if so, what aspects of the program contribute to those outcomes? FFTF participants are more likely to hold teaching-focused jobs at master's- and bachelor's-granting institutions than non-participant counterparts. Narratives from past participants provide multiple explanations for this observation: (1) applications to the FFTF program are more likely to come from PhD candidates who desire teaching-focused jobs; (2) FFTF participants gain interest in a teaching-focused job during their fellowship experience; and (3) FFT Fellows have more competitive applications with teaching-focused jobs because of the teaching experience and mentorship they receive during the fellowship period. Influential experiences of the FFTF program included teaching courses of their own design with students at different institutions, mentorship by faculty, and glimpses of faculty life and exposure to the role of faculty governance.

This study contributes further evidence that high-engagement future faculty programs contribute to participants' positive self-efficacy and academic career outcomes (Gaff et al., 2003; Pruitt-Logan et al.,

2002). Specifically, by aggregating respondent reflections across 15 cohorts, we add reliability to inferences about influential program components as compared to end-of-year program evaluations. In addition, we add knowledge about long-term PFF gains with respondents' reflections on their careers and the lasting meaning of their participation. This study provides concrete support to program leaders in graduate student professional development by sharing descriptions and assessments of our unique approach.

Influential elements of our immersive PFF program incorporate both low- and high-engagement activities (Davis & Minnis, 1993; Diggs et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2020; Vergara et al., 2014). Low to moderate engagement activities in the FFTF program include the Summer Institute pedagogy conference and workshops on pedagogical development. High-engagement activities in the FFTF program are experiential opportunities that include teaching courses at host institutions, participating in departmental decision-making, and faculty mentorship that includes teaching and career guidance. Considering long-term gains reported by our study participants, a worthy new avenue of study would be for researchers to compare job satisfaction for graduates of the PFF program compared to those who did not participate in the PFF program. The following discussion provides some considerations for program design, limitations, and recommendations for practitioners who support graduate student development.

### ***Considerations for the FFTF Program Design***

During this process, we analyzed our program goals to see how Fellows are reaching them. If Fellows did not reach the goals, we must consider how we can better support Fellows or whether these goals are no longer in alignment with the FFTF experience. The FFTF has the following goals for its participants: (1) teach established courses and, in some cases, develop new ones; (2) be prepared to teach in new academic settings; (3) teach and experience faculty life in a different academic setting to enhance career preparation; (4) experience life as

a faculty member (attend meetings and other departmental activities); and (5) participate in the faculty life at the host campus.

Many Fellows rate the teaching experiences of FFTF as somewhat valuable to valuable (Goals 1 and 2) and share narratives about how teaching in a different context was beneficial. The majority of Fellows rate that the FFTF played a large part in their career decisions (Goal 5). We could argue that Goal 5 was successful, as 93% ( $n = 50$ ) are working in higher education. Not all Fellows were able to reach Goals 3 and 4. Those who participated in aspects of faculty life (joining faculty meetings and participating in departmental and institutional decisions) ranked the experiences as high in relation to their academic career preparation (see Table 6). However, over 30% seem to not have participated in these experiences, indicating a misalignment of the goals for some institutions.

We are concerned about the substantial proportion of survey participants who indicated they had not participated in faculty meetings (Table 6), one of the key goals of the FFTF program. Our support staff needs to better communicate with the host universities about expectations that the Fellows be included in faculty life, giving examples of what this has looked like at other universities. It is also pertinent that we ensure more equitable mentoring experiences and intervene during negative mentoring experiences. Having our home institution team conduct regular meetings to check in with our Fellows and their faculty liaisons would be a positive first step. Fellows must also be equipped to address real and potentially negative experiences, such as faculty conflict and contentious discussions. These skills could be developed during our check-in meetings but also as part of our group conversations throughout the semester. We are developing mentorship opportunities for Fellows in addition to their dedicated faculty liaisons. In June 2021, we started a mentorship program in which we pair current Fellows or junior faculty with previous Fellows/senior faculty, to allow Fellows to grow their mentorship network. To date, we have created 15 mentorship relationships with this program.



Another potential change would be to rewrite our program goals, as this process demonstrated what current FFTF leadership feels is foundational to the program. Some goals are quite similar (Goals 3 and 4, for example), and we could include a goal that focuses on helping Fellows reflect on and develop the skills that they build over the fellowship, rather than just on what they do (what classes they teach, their involvement in faculty life). Looking at these data as a whole and where we are in the program, it seems necessary to revise our program goals to include transference of skills to their next career choices.

These study data also reveal that we could better serve students by offering support throughout the fellowship program and even during the application process. We are collecting applicant materials as samples, and we have recently offered a recruitment workshop. Fellows could also benefit from support at the start of the fellowship, such as support in moving to their host campus and learning about travel between campuses.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations exist for this study. First, the survey was distributed between June and July 2020 during the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic, which may have contributed to the low study engagement. Second, given the voluntary nature of this study, respondents might have pursued teaching careers regardless of FFTF experiences. Finding predictive or associative variables is outside the scope and method of this study. For both reasons, we cannot be sure that participation in FFTF translates to more success in pursuing teaching careers. However, it is illuminating how and which specific experiences in FFTF helped participants make experientially informed career decisions.

Additionally, the sample lacks demographic diversity and does not accurately represent the racial/ethnic makeup of our institution. With the small sample of students with minoritized identities, it was difficult to examine how certain identity markers have influenced FFTF experiences. Along those lines, students from STEM fields are also

underrepresented in our sample, though the demand at host institutions is quite high. Finally, our current institutional partnerships are not representative of the range of academic institutions, missions, and student profiles.

## Conclusion

This article addresses the aforementioned (Diggs et al., 2017; Ferren et al., 2002) gap in research that assesses Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programming outcomes. Our goal was to understand the perceptions of how the Future Faculty Teaching Fellowship (FFTF) program contributed toward participants' identity development, careers, and professional preparation. The FFTF program, as an immersive and intensive example of a PFF program, supports graduate students as they explore their interest in teaching-focused careers in higher education. In our study we found that (1) those who participated in the FFTF program are more likely to hold teaching-related positions at bachelor's- and master's-granting institutions when compared to non-FFTF students and (2) Fellows valued this program. Fellows especially found it meaningful to teach independently designed courses, to instruct student populations that differed from their home institution, to create a mentoring relationship with a faculty member, and to participate in faculty life.

The FFTF application process and the emphasis on prior teaching experience replicates hiring processes applicants may complete in their job searches, making them integral parts to the fellowship. The program provides opportunity for Fellows to gain experiences as instructors and junior faculty members, allowing them to successfully draw on teaching experiences in academic job applications. Furthermore, Fellows build communities and mentorships that help them integrate their experiences and formalize their identities as potential future faculty, supporting their early-career success. Through our research, we have demonstrated that Fellows valued this opportunity; we recommend

this program for institutions that seek to develop an immersive PFF experience that contributes to graduate students' career outcomes as well as personal identity and professional development.

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## **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors have no conflict of interest.

## **Data Availability**

The data reported in this manuscript are available on request by contacting the corresponding author. The survey instrument used in this manuscript is publicly available at [https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/28998/FFTF\\_survey.docx](https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/28998/FFTF_survey.docx).

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