

## **An Innovative Award Catches Faculty in the Act of Great Teaching**

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*This paper examines a novel approach to honoring faculty through a low-stakes, low-cost teaching award. It describes the development and implementation of the award at Augusta University, considers the advantages of the award as a means to promote teaching excellence, and reports on data assessing the award's impact on recipients and nominees.*

### **Introduction**

At a time when institutions are increasingly encouraged to promote teaching excellence while also under pressure to do more with less, we need to find more productive ways to demonstrate to the instructional corps that the institution values effective teaching. This paper describes a low-cost teaching award designed to boost morale among the faculty while increasing awareness of teaching excellence and sharing information on effective teaching practices at our institution. Because the "Caught in the Act of Great Teaching" award acknowledges specific actions rather than entire careers, it can recognize the achievements of a wide range of instructors, including contingent and early-career faculty. Furthermore, we present awards in the instructor's classroom, thereby involving students in the recognition of acts of excellent teaching. This paper also presents the findings of a study of the award's impact on both recipients and nominees.

### **Literature Review**

Articles that are now twenty years old document the pervasiveness of teaching awards on college campuses in the United States. Over two thirds of two-year and four-year liberal arts institutions, and most research institutions, had awards or programs that honored exemplary teaching (Jenrette &

Hayes, 1996; Menges, 1996; Zahorski, 1996). There seems no reason to anticipate a decline in these numbers, and indeed one discipline-specific study indicates an increase between 1991 and 2008 (Kalis & Kirschenbaum, 2008).

The motivations for these awards are not always clearly articulated, but Chism (2006) notes three goals of many awards programs that are relevant to the award discussed in this paper. She indicates that awards can: (1) symbolize an institution's commitment to teaching; (2) acknowledge and affirm those who teach well; and (3) encourage others to improve their teaching.

Although opinions on the value of institutional teaching awards have generally been positive (Huggett, 2012), there have been voices of dissent. Some have noted that teaching awards to individual recipients necessarily exclude other noteworthy and exemplary individuals (Ernest et al., 1995); others have suggested expanding the pool of honorees (Forsythe & Gandolfo, 1996; Svinicki & Menges, 1996; Zahorski, 1996). Yet, others have expressed concerns that the administration of awards is burdensome (Warren & Plumb, 1999).

Determining the value and effectiveness of teaching awards is difficult; there is still only limited evidence on their design, utility, and efficacy (Huggett et al., 2012). Although there is some evidence that awards offer recipients a sense of recognition (Brawer et al., 2006; Dinham & Scott, 2002; Ruedrich et al., 1992), the evidence on whether awards actually motivate improved teaching is mixed (Jacobsen, 1989; Tollefson & Tracy, 1983). For instance, Brawer, Steinert, St-Cyr, Watters, and Wood-Dauphinee (2006) report that 45% of the recipients of the award they studied considered the award as an incentive to improve their teaching. Others have pointed out that this motivation is of limited value because awards tend to affirm recipients rather than inspire others (Chism & Szabo, 1997; Francis, 1976; McNaught & Anwyl, 1992). Making progress in determining the value and effectiveness of award programs remains difficult in part because the goals and efficacy of the awards are not always clear. In her study of the criteria established for 144 teaching awards, Chism notes that "for a little more than half of the awards in the sample, no criteria or only a global statement associating the award with the term 'teaching excellence' is stated" (Chism, 2006, p. 592).

The effectiveness of any award will be determined by how well its criteria and implementation match its goals, and these will vary by institution; however, scholars have attempted to establish general criteria to facilitate the evaluation of teaching awards. In *Honoring Exemplary Teaching* (1996), Menges offers three tests to evaluate teaching awards: (1) the selection validity test; (2) the faculty motivation test; and (3) the test of public perceptions.

Concerns about the effectiveness of programs lead Sorcinelli and Davis (1996) to make three suggestions for improving teaching award programs: (1) the selection process should be clearly stated and widely publicized; (2) input from peers, administrators, and students should be an important part of the process; and (3) recognition should come in a variety of guises. They also recommend offering more awards and publicizing the achievements of exemplary teachers. Svinicki and Menges (1996) go further and outline ten guidelines for exemplary programs. Table 1 summarizes those guidelines and attaches labels to them for easy reference.

**Table 1**

Svinicki and Menges' (1996) Guidelines for Exemplary Teaching Awards

The program:

1. is consistent with the institution's mission and values.	Institutional Alignment
2. is grounded in research-based competencies.	Research-based Criteria
3. recognizes all significant facets of instructional activities.	Range of Instructional Activities
4. rewards collaborative and individual achievements.	Team and Individual Achievement
5. neither precludes nor displaces other rewards that are part of the institutionalized reward system.	Increased Institutional Rewards
6. calls on recipients to maintain their commitment to teaching excellence.	Recipient Contribution
7. promotes self-reflection on teaching practices among colleagues.	Collegial Self-Reflection
8. encourages self-reflection at all levels of the institution.	Institutional Reflection
9. is based on sound assessment practices.	Sound Assessment
10. is open to and able to adapt to changing conditions.	Adaptability

## **Background**

In the Fall of 2012, Augusta State University (ASU) saw itself in an unusual situation; it would cease to exist in five months.<sup>1</sup> In January of 2012, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia had announced that ASU—a liberal arts-based, open-access university with approximately 6500 students and a faculty dedicated to teaching—would be merged with Georgia Health Sciences University, an institution with only one overlapping program, in order to create a new research institution, Georgia Regents University.<sup>2</sup>

The Vice President for Academic Affairs asked the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to develop a program to improve faculty morale and maintain focus on ASU's institutional commitment to excellence in teaching. Shortly thereafter, the CTL Advisory Committee, a group of approximately a dozen faculty members from all of the institution's colleges, developed a theme of "Celebrating Teaching, Honoring Faculty" and created a new type of teaching award.

### **Award**

Up to this point, ASU had only one institution-wide teaching award. Its application and selection process was so burdensome that at least one department chair had to resort to cajoling faculty members who had been nominated for the award to submit applications for it.

Working within budgetary and time constraints, the advisory committee established the following framework for developing the new teaching award:

- The process would not be burdensome for the nominee (i.e., limited or no application process).
- The selection process would not be burdensome to administer (i.e., limited time commitment from members of the selection committee).
- Multiple calls for nominations would be made during the course of a semester.
- The award could not include a significant monetary reward.
- All instructors would be eligible to receive the award.
- The award would be given to one individual per nomination call.

The "Caught in the Act of Great Teaching" award (CIA) was not designed to make significant claims about the recipient's teaching excellence. That is to say, it does not evaluate nominees in terms of long-term achievement or a strong commitment to exemplary teaching. In fact, the award does not claim that the recipient is an exemplary teacher; instead it recognizes that the recipient acted in an exemplary manner in a particular instance.

The committee decided that an award would be given every two to three weeks throughout the semester; faculty members, staff, or students could submit nominations; and that there would be no restrictions on the rank or

status of the recipients, i.e., they could be contingent or tenured/tenure-track instructors of any rank or level of experience.

The CTL publicized the call for nominations through the CTL newsletter, on flyers distributed around campus, and in the weekly university faculty/staff newsletter. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2**

Text of call for nominations

**Have you caught someone in the act of great teaching?  
The Center for Teaching and Learning wants to hear about it.**

Students, staff, and faculty members are invited to nominate faculty members for a "Caught in the Act of Great Teaching" award. These awards include a gift card from Barnes and Noble, a certificate recognizing the accomplishment of the awardee, and a mug identifying the awardee as one who has been caught in the act of great teaching.

Nominations should include name of the instructor and a less-than-100-word description of the reason for the nomination.

A graduate student assistant collected nominations, which were submitted to the CTL by email. These were anonymized and then sent to a selection committee, which consisted of five volunteers from the CTL Advisory Committee. The committee members were instructed to rank order the nominations. We did not suggest any elaborate criteria or an assessment rubric. The assistant then reviewed the responses and determined the winner.

Members of the CTL Advisory Committee delivered the award, entering the recipient's classroom unannounced at the beginning of a class session. A member of the committee announced, "[name of recipient], *you* have been caught in the act of great teaching!" described the award to the recipient and the class, and took a photograph of the recipient holding a certificate recognizing the awardee as having been *Caught in the Act of Great Teaching*. The certificate was signed by both the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and was accompanied by a coffee mug declaring, "I was Caught in the Act of Great Teaching." The photograph and a brief article on the nomination later appeared in the university's official internal publication and in the CTL newsletter. CTL staff placed photographs of and information on the recipients on the CTL website.

During the first semester of the award program, which was prior to the consolidation of ASU and GHSU, only members of the ASU faculty were eligible for the award. However, the positive response to the award convinced the CTL to continue the award program after the consolidation. Therefore, faculty members from the Health Sciences campus of the newly formed Georgia Regents University became eligible for the award during the second semester of the program.

In the first year, 27 faculty members were nominated for the award: six from the College of Allied Health, one from the College of Education, four from the College of Nursing, three from the College of Science and Mathematics, two from the College of Business, three from the Medical College, and eight from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Most nominations came from colleagues of the nominees. Of the 27 nominees, twelve received the award: two from Nursing, two from Science and Mathematics, one from Business, two from the Medical College, and five from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. These included a mix of contingent and tenured/tenure-track faculty.

At the end of the academic year, the CTL held a "Celebration of Faculty" reception for all award recipients and nominees, as well as their department chairs and deans. This reception highlighted a common ground on which faculty from both prior institutions were valued equally. The inclusion of the nominees at the reception increased the number of faculty affected by the award because prior to the invitation to the reception these individuals had not known that they had been nominated. All recipients and nominees were recognized at the reception by having their nominations read aloud. Faculty and administrators in attendance noted the positive atmosphere generated by recognizing the mutual interests and goals of faculty from both former institutions. The reception, therefore, proved to be a particularly beneficial event during the stressful consolidation process, which often highlighted the differences between institutional cultures.

Changes to the mission and operations of the CTL led to the decision to suspend the award during the 2013-2014 year, the first full academic year of the consolidated university.<sup>3</sup> However, the need to celebrate faculty remained, and expressions of a desire to renew the CIA award were heard around the campuses. Thus, we reinstated the award for the academic year 2014-15. At this time, several modifications of process and procedure were made. First, the Office of Student Affairs helped facilitate distribution of information about the award more effectively to students. This assistance had

a notable impact: 90% of the 82 nominations that went to the selection committee came from students. Second, members of the selection committee were recruited from among previous recipients of the award. Third, committee members no longer ranked the nominees, instead they responded to two prompts: "Did the nomination describe an act?" and "Was the act exceptional?" One point was awarded for each positive response. An administrative assistant tallied the responses and the two nominations with the highest point total—one from each campus—identified the award recipients. The selection committee generally had four members, so each nomination could receive up to eight points. Ties were infrequent but did occur. These were resolved by using a fifth reviewer to break the tie. The procedure for delivery of the award was the same, with members of the selection committee and the staff of the CTL arriving during class to present the certificate and a mug.

The nominees were distributed among the institution's colleges: six from Allied Health, three from the College of Education, nine from the College of Nursing, 18 from the College of Science and Mathematics, five from the College of Business, 20 from the Medical College, one from the College of Dental Medicine, 19 from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and one who was nominated for a course taught for the entire Health Sciences campus. Seven faculty members received the award: four from the Medical College, two from the College of Science and Mathematics, and one from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

The nominations that led to awards typically identified acts that were perceived to be "above and beyond" the usual student-instructor interaction. For example, several nominations commended Health Science faculty members for taking extra time to work with students or residents: "He [was] obviously worn out from the night.... Instead of leaving to nap he asked us to pick out a topic that we needed help with."; "He continually stays late in the days and nights leading up to anatomy practicals...willingly going through each cadaver"; "[She] took the time to walk [us] through every interesting case. She quizzed us each individually with questions suited to our level of training."; "He took the time to read all of my patient notes and gave me individualized feedback on them."

Similarly, nominations from the Summerville (i.e. the former ASU) campus praised instructors for engaging students and helping ensure that their students learned the material: "She has met with students, as an extra class gathering, on her own time to go over difficult chapters. I have never seen a teacher so devoted to the success of their [sic] students"; "Wearing a cowboy hat, holding a cow brander, and grinning from ear to ear, [he] entered...class

excited to share his love of history with his students”; “[He] stayed after class to further explain what he expected.... He offered to proof read [sic].... He was willing to use more of his time to help us”; “[She] consistently goes out of her way to help students, in the classroom and outside of it.... On behalf of...one of her students, [she] contacted the financial aid office to help resolve stressful delays and communication breakdowns.”

### **Implementation: Concerns and Considerations**

We continue to modify the program to maintain its relevance and vitality. For example, the selection process was initially more time-intensive than anticipated, especially for the assistant tasked with collecting, editing, and distributing the nominations as well as collecting and collating the selection committee members’ responses. The large volume of nominations also raised the question of how long nominations were to be included in the pool of nominations. We decided that nominations would be included for two rounds only. Initially a recipient was named every two to three weeks. In part to extend the award’s currency, and in part to reduce the time commitment of the faculty and staff administering the program, it is at present awarded monthly. These and other measures helped streamline the selection process so that it would meet the criterion that the selection process should not be burdensome.

When the number of nominations from one of the two campuses consistently outnumbered nominations from the other campus, we changed the award schedule to alternate monthly between the two campuses. This has been effective. Fortunately, and without any selection criterion explicitly addressing this, the award recipients have been distributed throughout the consolidated institution’s nine colleges. This is, however, something that we will continue to monitor.

### **Alternate Versions**

While our vision and procedures for the award have been influenced by our institutional context, the program is readily adaptable. It has already been adapted by two other institutions within the University System of Georgia. Although these programs are similar to our prototype, there are a couple of notable procedural differences. At one institution that has neither an established center of teaching and learning nor much of a budget, the program was supported with money from an anonymous donor and help from



the Student Government Association. Students were part of the selection committee, and the university mascot participated in the presentation of the award. At another institution, the CTL invited nominations through an online Google form and determined recipients by the number of nominations received by an individual. At this second institution both the university mascot and cheerleaders were present for the delivery of the award.<sup>4</sup>

Although changes to the mission and operations of our Center for Teaching and Learning led to the decision not to continue the award during the 2013-2014 academic year, the CTL organized a contest along similar lines that recognized faculty members who embodied the six values of the university. During the Celebration of Faculty that year, CIA-Values nominees were recognized and names were drawn for winners of two parking places, a valuable commodity at a university where convenient parking places are hard to find and expensive to reserve. In this iteration the award not only served to recognize faculty, but promoted awareness of the values in the institution's "Mission, Vision, and Values Statement."

### **Assessing the Impact of the Award**

The CIA award was created by the CTL Advisory Committee as a strategy to improve morale and remind the university community of its commitment to excellent teaching. Specifically, the committee wanted the award to recognize the "everyday" efforts of teaching faculty. We anticipated that, beyond the award itself, the publicity surrounding the award would both bring recognition to the recipients and emphasize the importance of teaching to the community.

In order to examine the impact of the award, we administered a survey through Qualtrics to all CIA recipients and nominees during the first year of the award program. To examine the impact of the award on individual instructors, we asked awardees and nominees to "rate the impact that being 'Caught in the Act of Great Teaching' had on your sense of self as a teacher" on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely negative impact; 7 = extremely positive impact); to report the extent to which they agreed that "receiving this award in front of my students was a positive experience" (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree); and to indicate the extent to which the award improved their awareness of their teaching style (1 = not at all; 5 = a lot). In addition, open-ended questions requested that respondents report on the impact that receiving the award had on their classroom environment. To de-

termine whether the award might have influenced awareness of the university's commitment to the teaching mission, the survey asked participants to indicate whether receiving the award impacted their awareness of teaching-related events and workshops (yes/no) and whether the CTL should continue the award (yes/no) and why. Since these individuals had been recognized for good teaching behaviors, we asked them to share teaching tips, with the intention of including those in future issues of the CTL newsletter.

### **Impact on Individual Instructors**

Twelve award recipients or nominees responded (31% response rate) to the survey. All of the respondents reported an at least somewhat positive impact of receiving or being nominated for the award on their sense of self as a teacher ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .91$ ); 83% agreed that receiving the award in front of their students was a positive experience ( $M = 5.92$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ); and 72% reported that the award or nomination had improved their awareness of their teaching style ( $M = 3.64$  of 5;  $SD = 1.36$ ).

Open-ended responses were reviewed by three judges—two faculty members and a graduate assistant. A review to consensus of the valence of the responses revealed that the award was generally perceived as having a positive impact on the classroom (6 positive, 1 neutral, 5 no impact). The judges then analyzed responses to identify recurring themes utilizing an exploratory qualitative analysis.<sup>5</sup> The two themes that arose in response to the question about the impact of the award on classroom environment suggest that the goals of the award may have been achieved. Respondent comments addressed (1) the effect of the award on their sense of validation or recognition and (2) the broader pedagogical impact or effect on teacher motivation.

For example, respondents reported that they felt validated or recognized:

*“The nomination...validates that the hard work I put into each hospital clinical experience with the nursing students is more than worth the effort.”*

*“The satisfaction one feels when you are recognized by one of your own students for ‘greatness’ is unmatched in this career.”*

*“...this really made me see how our influence as educators is received in the classroom...”*

Respondents also reported that they felt more motivated in their teaching role:

“...it motivated me to give even more to the students.”

“...this gave me motivation to keep trying new teaching techniques and to keep trying to work with students in different ways.”

“...it helped me to realize some of the needs of the students, what helps them learn, what can I do to modify future lessons, [and] courses that reach and benefit the most students.”

### **Institutional Impact**

Approximately half (45%) of the respondents indicated that receiving the award had impacted their awareness of teaching-related events and activities on campus, and all respondents agreed that the CTL should continue the award in the future.

Respondents recommended a variety of teaching strategies, suggesting that they recognized the value of using a variety of approaches to improve student learning. Judges identified four major themes in their responses. The first theme addressed the need to encourage or support students and their learning. This theme was represented by comments that focused on establishing relationships with students:

“Confidence, encouragement, and empathy...and a genuine love for what you are doing are all important for being a successful teacher.”

“You have to make a connection with each student and they have to sense that it is genuine.”

“I try...[to] decrease the students’ anxiety for being ‘called on’ in class.”

“It is highly important to show respect to students so that they are able to trust and then learn.”

The second theme addressed the importance of employing multiple teaching methods. This theme appeared in comments about incorporating a

variety of teaching methods (e.g., interactive lectures, case studies, hands-on skills) and the ability to be flexible in response to the needs of students:

“Engaging students to be active participants in every clinical opportunity to learn and master skills by finding them a variety of experiences.”

“Be flexible. Each class is different and you’ve got to figure out what works and do more of that and find out what doesn’t and let it go.”

“I like to use a variety of evaluation methods. Thus students who are not good test takers have other places to shine.”

The third theme concerned the need to create exercises in which students applied the material covered in the course in meaningful situations that were often closely related to situations they would encounter in their future professions:

“I focus on the real life application of the material we are covering.”

“Role playing real life situations so that it has ‘real world applicability’ not ‘just what is written in the textbook.’”

“Often evaluations are modeled on actually [sic] activities students will have to do as professionals.”

The final theme involved adding style or showmanship to the classroom to engage students. Respondents indicated that using humor, irony, or flair helped capture the students’ attention:

“Edu-tainment (entertaining students while educating).”

“...make a connection...[with] a glance, a shared sense of irony, something.”

“Have a style and some flair in the classroom. The students should walk out of class thinking they just learned the most amazing thing ever discussed on planet Earth. Humor is good.”

## **Discussion**

The results of this study suggest that our attempt to honor teaching led instructors to feel validated and motivated them to attend to their teaching style and content. Although the comments from respondents were generally positive, ceiling effects may be present (i.e., award-winning instructors may have little room for improvement in the classroom). The majority of respondents indicated that the award was a distinct way to honor faculty and should be continued. These results confirm those reported by Brawer et al. (2006). They reported that 91% of the recipients who responded to their survey considered the award they studied to be valuable to them personally compared to 100% for our survey, even though our survey included both recipients and nominees. It is also noteworthy that 72% of this survey's respondents expressed a heightened awareness of teaching style, a fundamental component of scholarly teaching. The comments from the qualitative data confirm the results of the quantitative data and suggest that the sense of validation was accompanied by motivation to improve teaching for a significant number of respondents.

The qualitative comments on teaching strategies reveal an interesting focus on affective features of the student-teacher relationship, which is a criterion that students have been known to value more than classroom performance (Jacobson 1989). The qualitative comments also focused on establishing rich learning experiences. Fink asserts that “[p]robably the single most powerful change most teachers can make in their courses is to expand the experiential dimension of student learning” (Fink, 2013, p. 125), and in the qualitative comments half of the respondents referred to this aspect of their teaching as a source of success in the learning environment.

## **Evaluation**

As noted earlier, concerns about the effectiveness of teaching awards led Sorcinelli and Davis (1996) to make three suggestions for improving teaching award programs. This program meets these three criteria, albeit perhaps not in the sense intended. The criteria for selection were clearly stated and circulated in a variety of forums (Suggestion 1). Although input from peers, administrators, and students was not a part of each individual nomination, it was an important part of the process (Suggestion 2). Finally, recipients were recognized in at least three different settings: in the classroom (or other ed-

educational setting), in university publications, and in front of peers and administrators (Suggestion 3). Furthermore, as Sorcinelli and Davis recommend, the program also expanded significantly the number of instructors being recognized for teaching. The public recognition ceremonies and the published materials also focused on specific practices and habits of the recipients, thereby promoting an awareness of good teaching practices.

If we assess the CIA award using Menges' three tests to evaluate teaching awards (the test of public perceptions, the faculty motivation test, and the selection validity test), the award program probably fails (Menges 1996). There is no evidence that knowledge of the award has moved beyond the walls of the institution into the local community and, thereby, changed external public perceptions about how the institution values teaching. If there has been a change in perception, it has likely been internal, limited to students who have seen or heard about faculty members receiving the awards in their classrooms. Secondly, the survey indicates that recipients and nominees felt increased motivation, but we have no evidence that faculty members modified their behavior to compete for the award. Finally, to pass Menges' selection validity test, the award has to be both accurate in identifying the best candidates and representative in the selection. The recipients have been spread among the colleges, so we can claim representativeness, but there is no verifiable evidence of accuracy.

An evaluation of the program according to the ten guidelines for exemplary programs articulated by Svinicki & Menges (1996) yields mixed results.<sup>6</sup> CIA meets Criteria 1 (Institutional Alignment), 3 (Range of Instructional Activities), 5 (Increased Institutional Rewards), and 10 (Adaptability) structurally. It is consistent with the institution's mission and values (Criterion 1). While each recipient is acknowledged for a specific behavior, the program rewards instructional activities in any educational environment from the freshman classroom to the instruction of medical residents (Criterion 3). Nominations have featured a wide range of activities. One nomination highlighted a faculty member who helped answer questions when he overheard students talking about a different class, while others covered faculty mentoring in labs and clinical settings. Some nominations also mentioned specific features of curriculum design. The award program does not displace other awards (Criterion 5). Finally, the award has proven to be adaptable to changing institutional contexts (Criterion 10). Indeed, what started out as a mechanism to improve faculty morale became a way to establish common ground and a focus on teaching among faculty from widely

divergent institutional contexts and experiences in the new university created by consolidation.

Criteria 2 (Research-based Criteria), 7 (Collegial Self-Reflection) and 8 (Institutional Reflection) were realized at least partially. Criterion 2, grounding the selection criteria in research-based competencies, is met in practice; the judges know the scholarly literature of teaching and learning. Through both the nomination process and the subsequent publicity, the program encourages collegial reflection on teaching practices on at least a basic level (Criterion 7). The nomination process encourages self-reflection (Criterion 8), especially among students, but also among faculty and some administrators, about pedagogic practices; however, we cannot claim that this happens systematically at all levels of the institution.

The program does not meet Criteria 4 (Team and Individual Achievement), 6 (Recipient Contribution), and 9 (Sound Assessment). Although the award does not explicitly exclude collaborative achievements, it is unlikely that this will occur frequently (Criterion 4). Similarly, although the award does not suggest that the recipients rest on pedagogical laurels, it does not overtly call on awardees to continue their contributions. However, the survey results discussed above do indicate that this has been achieved in practice (Criterion 6). Above all, though, the award is not based on sound assessment practices (Criterion 9). The evidence gathered is anecdotal and relies on the veracity of the nomination and the perceptions of the nominators. The award can, therefore, be said to meet the guidelines only partially. Furthermore, the award is not holistic; it does not take into account issues of course development or educational research.

Further research on the award might allow us to develop more concrete responses about how well the award fits Svinicki and Menges' criteria. It would also allow us to answer some of the questions left open after the initial survey. A study of the nominations might reveal information about students' perceptions of the nature and qualities of excellent teaching. Now that we have a larger pool of recipients and nominees, one could track their participation in OFDTE-sponsored events to determine if these faculty members have become more active in faculty development programs. A new survey of the faculty corps as a whole might help determine the depth and breadth of awareness of the award, the perception of its value, and whether faculty who have not been recipients or nominees have been motivated by the existence of the award to improve their teaching.

Acknowledging the program's limits in meeting Svinicki and Menges' criteria does not, however, mean that the program is without value. Hammer

et al. (2010) recommend that an institution with multiple teaching awards base the awards on different criteria and use different methods of selection. Svinicki and Menges (1996), Sorcinelli and Davis (1996), and Chism (2006) acknowledge that no single award will be enough to demonstrate the excellence in teaching pledged in many institutional mission statements. Given this point, one can reasonably reverse the interrogation and ask about the value of applying these different tests and criteria to the CIA award. We designed the award to be an effective program for our institution that complemented other efforts. We would like to suggest that award programs—including ones that do not qualify as exemplary under Svinicki and Menges' guidelines—can be a vital part of a deliberate program that fosters and values excellent teaching, and that the “Caught in the Act of Great Teaching” award fits within this framework at our institution.

As we indicated earlier, the award was developed in the unusual context of the imminent consolidation of two institutions with distinctly different profiles. The award was created to bolster the morale of a faculty that was experiencing significant turmoil. After the merger, the program was continued as one component of a strategy that sought to foster a new institutional culture by focusing on common strengths. The program succeeded in both of these areas. But it also succeeded in achieving goals encountered more frequently in institutions of higher education. The award expanded the ways students can contribute to recognizing excellent teaching. It significantly increased the number and range of individuals being recognized for their teaching. It has spread an awareness of the variety of settings and the nature of educational activities at the university. The award reception and general publicity about the award help disseminate information on good teaching practices and raise the profile of the OFDTE.<sup>7</sup> Through these features, the “Caught in the Act of Great Teaching” award has contributed uniquely to our institution's efforts to promote teaching excellence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As will become clear below, the institutional context of the award was critical to its development. Unfortunately, the institutional history is also a bit confusing. To help clarify matters we summarize the history in this note. The award was developed by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Augusta State University (ASU) in the semester before ASU was consolidated with Georgia Health Sciences University (GHSU) to form Georgia Regents



University (GRU) in January 2013. GRU was subsequently renamed Augusta University (AU). After the consolidation, the CTL became the Office for Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence (OFDTE).

<sup>2</sup> Both institutions had nursing programs.

<sup>3</sup> The change in mission was reflected in the change in name from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to the Office of Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence (OFDTE).

<sup>4</sup> We thank Lauren DiPaula (Georgia Southwestern State University) and Kathryn Pridemore (Dalton State College) for providing us with this information.

<sup>5</sup> After coming to a consensus, judges coded responses for presence of the identified themes. Fleiss' kappa statistic was computed to quantify inter-coder agreement, which revealed almost perfect agreement (kappa = .83; Landis & Koch, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> For a list of the guidelines see Table 1.

<sup>7</sup> We recognize that excellent teaching is not a collection of unique practices—a little bag of tricks, if you will—but rather needs to be a set of practices integrated with intentional course and curriculum design and delivery. However, highlighting individual best practices can help engage faculty in the process of self-reflection on teaching practices.

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