

The Teaching and Learning Collaborative 2017 Innovative Teaching Award Winners

Sarah E. Dahill-Brown, Politics & International Affairs

This course, POL 213 Special Topics in U.S. Politics, is one I have been developing since my arrival at WFU. While the academic objectives at the center of the course have remained consistent, I have redesigned writing assignments to help students relate the course material to their own experiences and identities; partnering with an organization (Youth in Transition, a non-profit organization that supports young people exiting foster care) so that students might have a sustained, out-of-classroom experience and offering expanded student autonomy in the final project, supported by early formative assessment.

These innovations were motivated by observations during the spring of 2013. The abstract manner in which inequality is often discussed means that the human element can get lost in class discussions – both the way inequality manifests in the lives of individuals and the way individuals affect changes in the structure of the political economy. The absence of a tangible human element from key readings, and the complexity of the economic and political institutions we investigate can have at least two effects. Students may not always feel invested, and the immensity of the challenges created by runaway income and wealth inequality, combined with the complexity of the systems that produced them, can lead students to throw their hands up in the air, expressing a sense of futility, or low efficacy, even when they are invested. I wanted to facilitate a consistent, personal connection to the material; increase students' sense of efficacy; and strengthen problem-solving and team-work skills, through a combination of reflective writing assignments, a community engagement project, deliberate inclusion of current events, and autonomy in developing a final project or paper.

I observed higher levels of consistent, personal engagement from students during class discussions and in their writing (especially reading responses), relative to the spring of 2013. The project with YIT introduced a specific policy issue early in the semester – foster care – and seemed to ground conversations about inequality in the needs and experiences of people in Winston-Salem. At the time when students began reading about foster care policy, and meeting with YIT, they had just turned in a reflective essay on their own personal background and how it had shaped their opportunities and ideas. Because the young people served by YIT are the same age as the students at WFU, several commented about the stark differences they observed, and approached their group projects with a sense of urgency. This heightened personal investment and ownership also came across in nearly every students' final project. Rather than assign a uniform final paper or project, I instructed students to turn in a prospectus that identified the scope of their project and the objectives it connected to as well as explained how it would demonstrate mastery of those course objectives. In this class, through the projects with YIT, students met with members of an organization actively engaged in trying to serve an economically disadvantaged population of young people.

Students heard firsthand stories of lobbying (successfully) to secure an important policy change – NC state legislators raised the age-limit on services for young people in foster care. Students then got to be a part of YIT's implementation efforts.

When students couldn't find existing statistics, they called experts or insurance companies or reached out to me or to YIT. When they were not sure how best to format or structure the project, I asked them to think about what would be useful to our nonprofit partner. By and large, students reported working well with one another, and a number even stated in their evaluation that this was the best group project they had ever worked on. Many students' sense of efficacy was also palpably stronger in their final projects relative to the previous iteration of the class. Many of the projects sought to redress inequalities in political participation or pass on lessons about how inequality works. Finally, the students' projects were of value to the team of providers at YIT, supplementing the capacity of their small organization. Executive Director Alex Hudson used the guides and papers at implementation meetings around the state and shared the research conducted by the students with his busy staff who spend the majority of their working time on casework. He was happy with his interactions with the students and optimistic about future projects with WFU.

Amanda Foster, ZSR Library

LIB 100, Accessing Information in the 21st Century, was a re-designed version of LIB 100 around an emerging pedagogy in information literacy called Critical Information Literacy. Critical Information Literacy explores how information is used as a structure of power and oppression, and how these power structures can be resisted and changed. New learning goals inspired by Critical Information Literacy were built on LIB 100's traditional learning outcomes that encompass skill sets involving the discovery, production, and creation of information. Two new assignment sequences were inspired by the desire to include Critical Information Literacy outcomes in the course: 1) The class blog (on Medium.com) is designed to encourage individual critical reflection on issues of power and privilege related to information production, access, and use, 2) The Wikipedia Article Project encourages students to discover how power, privilege, and oppression operate within Wikipedia, and offers an opportunity to "resist" by creating an article about someone from a group that is underrepresented on Wikipedia (women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, etc...). These are authentic learning projects in that both are "real-world" projects where student contributions are seen by a wider audience than just the instructor or peers in the class. Fifty-nine thousand people viewed the Wikipedia articles the students made last semester, a fact that both impresses them and impresses upon them the importance of the work they are contributing. Writing articles about "real-life" people, especially those who have been largely ignored and marginalized by history, encourages personal investment in the problem. It also imparts a desire to do whatever small part they can to enact change, in a positive way, through the creation of their articles. Inspired by work being done with Critical Information Literacy, I have been able to explore these new options that teach a pragmatically necessary search feature, while also critiquing its major flaws. I cannot overstate how much of a departure this work is from work that is traditionally done in

“library courses” across the profession since historically speaking, “library courses” have shied away from any discussion on the embedded inequities that exist within the library and information landscape. The last several years have seen the rise in many important social and political movements, which have pushed librarians to engage in critical reflection on issues of power, privilege, bias, and oppression within our own wheelhouse and to engage these issues in our teaching.

Amanda Gengler, Sociology

Soc 398, Sociology of Food, was a new course. In conjunction with our Health and wellbeing concentration, I wanted to add another health-focused course to my rotation. Based on my work with the ACE Fellows program around the use of community partnerships, I developed a combination approach of community engagement and critical student writing to reflect on their own position in the food system. Students participated in the Campus Kitchen program, and we partnered with the Second Harvest Food Bank and at the end of the semester students designed a class project to raise awareness about the inequalities in the food system and about Campus Kitchen and its mission.

The challenge with community engagement is that it can discourage students from taking a fully sociological view of a given social problem or inequality. They often come to see philanthropy as the solution to problems with policy-level causes that require policy-level changes. At the same time community work is an important and eye-opening learning experience in itself. My goal with combining the community engagement with regular, structured reflective writing was to muddy the waters for students. An example of this is one question they had to answer after each community engagement: “What were you NOT able to accomplish by doing this work?”. Though students initially struggled with this question and tended to focus on problems of size/scale alone, as we worked through the course material they developed more sophisticated responses. They began to recognize that policy changes, like fundamental shifts in the structure of the food system, or better access to a living wage were at the root of the problems they were addressing. Students began the course with individualistic perspectives about how people could improve their eating habits but in their final project, where they logged everything they ate for a week, they reflected on how their consumption connected them to all the other people in the food system. Students achieved the goals for the course: To reflect insightfully on their own social position in the community food hierarchies, to write clearly and eloquently about complex social issues and use compelling data to support an analytic argument. For the final class project, students organized an event in Benson. Locating themselves outside the food court at dinnertime, they used iPads and developed a buzzfeed quiz to help their peers learn about inequalities in the food system. They also handed out fact sheets which they had developed from the course readings, and added information about the Triad Community Kitchen’s efforts.

Scott Geyer, Chemistry

Physical Chemistry I Lab, Chm 341L: The upper level laboratory courses in chemistry present a critical opportunity to directly engage our majors in an interactive, small class atmosphere. The existing course curriculum did not take full advantage of this important opportunity and held low standards for student writing. I have overhauled the course to provide a pathway for students to develop as scientific writers by using class time to teach writing, providing examples, and most importantly incorporating review and revision as a central part of the writing process. In addition, using resources provided as part of a Summer Course (Re)Design grant, I have developed online videos and quizzes to ‘flip’ the pre-lab lecture content, both improving student preparation and repurposing the lecture time for one-on-one review of student writing. Other innovations include providing scaffolding for data analysis by introducing tutorial assignments and updating laboratory experiments with modern instrumental techniques. My overarching goal for this course is that it should take advantage of the small class size to teach content that students need but which is challenging to cover in larger lecture courses. The focus on scientific writing is motivated by the ability to give in-person feedback in the small class setting, the lack of rigorous instruction on this topic within our major, and the immense importance of this skill to our majors. The two writing-focused learning goals are: 1) Students will be able to prepare high-quality written reports explaining scientific concepts and experimental data. Students will be able to adhere to the formatting styles used in scientific literature, and to communicate a clear story to the audience at an appropriate technical level. 2) Students will learn to value revision as an important part of the creative process.

The first learning goal requires clear communication of what constitutes high-quality scientific writing. The innovations above, in particular review and revision, are key to obtaining this learning objective. The second learning goal focuses on important role revision plays in writing, since high-quality writing is not obtainable without revision. While it is arguably hard to measure how a student ‘values’ revision, placing it as an objective highlights its importance to students. A cover letter, written as part of the revision process, is designed to help students recognize their learning progress. Obtaining the learning objectives requires a significant leap in student ability, and the existing class structure of 10 identical assignments was not adequate. Guided by my participation in the Writing Associates Seminar, I implemented structured, multi-week assignments incorporating review and revision that are known to improve student- learning outcomes in writing. I also used online videos and quizzes to re-purpose lecture time, replacing the lecture with short, focused, online videos showing the actual experimental setup, accompanied by quizzes, which resulted in stronger student preparation. Equally important, the lecture time was re-purposed to better use: teaching writing and data analysis. I believe that due to this course, these students will excel in this aspect of their future careers.

Stephanie Koscak, History

HST 325: “English Kings, Queens, and Spectacle”, is an elective course for History majors and minors in the field of European and/or Pre-Modern history. Focusing on

early modern England between the reigns of Henry VIII and George II (roughly 1509-1760), this class explores the ways in which English royal authority was created, legitimized, performed, and challenged through ritual, image, and text. While adopting a broad approach to examine the wide variety of media forms through which politics took place (such as paintings, performances, engravings, books, and newspapers), one of the primary aims of this class is to explore the evolving relationship between the crown and the public sphere accompanying the invention and spread of print. This was an entirely new course and the main innovation was twofold. First, in order to emphasize the role of print culture in early modern England and to teach students the skills of close critical analysis of original historical texts, I worked closely with Megan Mulder in Special Collections so that each student researched a single archival object across the entire semester. Second, students produced a bibliographic and biographical history of their source that was published as an edited collection through Library Partners Press. The book is currently available in e-book copy and through Amazon.

Overall, I had two main learning goals through designing this assignment – one related to helping students practice skills of historical research and critical thinking, the other related to writing (including helping students think about audience, genre, and purpose). These objectives helped students become self-regulated learners and transfer their research and writing skills to other classes within and outside of the History Department. To help students practice skills of historical research and deep, critical thinking about primary sources, they also worked closely with Special Collections to locate a single archival text published during the period covered by this class and related to royal and political culture. I wanted to design a project that allowed students to work more closely with a smaller number of these sources in order to encourage them to slow down and critically engage with books as complex objects that can reveal exciting information about past readers, audiences, authors, publishers, and the state. By encouraging hands-on experiential learning in Special Collections, I hoped to cultivate skills of self-regulated learning, close reading, and critical interpretation. The second aim of this course was to introduce students to a professional genre of historical writing and to encourage multiple rounds of peer review by publishing their research essays as an edited collection, titled *Reading the Regime: Media and Politics in Early Modern England*. Working closely with Bill Kane at Wake Forest's Library Partners Press, I designed a highly scaffolded assignment to support this goal. Each student proposed and wrote a bibliographic history of their chosen archival source, while crafting an argument about how their text both reflected and shaped ideas about monarchy and political culture in early modern England. Publishing their essays in a publically available volume using a professional genre helped foster student motivation and enabled students to cultivate additional skills of self-regulated learning while also allowing them to reflect back on the instabilities and complexities of early modern texts by seeing all of the various components of today's publication process. As the essays in our published volume demonstrate, students developed highly original and perceptive arguments about early modern readers, about the political differences between multiple editions of single texts, and about how print culture affected the representation of specific rulers and authors.

Michael Sloan, Classical Languages

Classical Mythology 261 is an old offering at Wake Forest. I introduced numerous changes to the course, but the most significant was the “Socratic” initiative, which flipped the classroom in a controlled environment, making it more student-centered and using active learning techniques. The course was previously taught in a strictly lecture format, with a mythology textbook to supplement the content. The first thing I changed was the required text(s): instead of requiring one textbook with a synthesis of historical and mythological information, I instead required seminal primary sources that constitute a standard canon of “myths” in translation, and then wrote my own historical introductions for each author/text and posted these on Sakai. The task of synthesis then became an element of the Socratic classroom initiative. As the instructor, I took on the persona of Socrates, questioning the students about the content and implications of the readings. Thus, the classroom became the “agora” and the students were Athenian citizens. Finally, I integrated the syllabus and my in-class verbal assessments with Wilson’s Taxonomies of the Cognitive Domain. I added the VALUE rubrics for Critical Thinking, Written Communication and Oral Communication to guide my students and myself in the assessment process. By matching the syllabus with the language in these resources, the students have a framework in which they can self-assess on areas of progress and improvement. My goals reflected my commitment to maintaining the integrity of literary divisional, emphasizing reading, critical thinking, and reasoned expression through spoken in-class responses and written assignments outside of class. To ensure that students were learning the necessary information and facts, they took short reading response quizzes through Sakai, which gave them immediate feedback and correction usually unavailable in a large class.

I began this Socratic approach because it afforded me the opportunity to contextualize these texts by using them as they were originally performed and read, and by (re)creating the agora in the classroom the students participated in the methodology which transformed education. We are using the same plays, poems, and productions that were the furniture of Socrates’ mind. Students are steeped in Socrates’ method—they are required not to receive material from a lecturer, but rather to respond with reasoned expression (in front of the “city”/class) to a series of prompts or questions that require critical, reflective thinking. Not only did this require the students to be exposed to the material, but they also had to digest it and articulate responses to it. A student could be called on at any point—every student’s name is on a note card and these are randomized at the beginning of class. When a student is called on, he/she stands up and either chooses a prompt from a PowerPoint slide or is asked one of my choosing. The prompts are scaffolded to move from factual, text-based issues to thinking about implications and larger issues of a text. The whole class has to attend to the speaker’s answers because sometimes I randomly draw another name and have that student continue the response of the first student or offer a different interpretation. Students may also interrupt and ask questions while this is going on. The Socratic method in combination with the AAC&U VALUE rubrics offered me the opportunity to provide substantive feedback on their oral performances, which was integrated with how they might also improve their written assignments. The success of this innovation was

demonstrated in the constant participation, involvement, and enthusiastic atmosphere in the class, as well as by the quality of student responses and questions.

Eric Stottlemyer, English

ENV 306 was a new course I developed as a way to test a few pedagogical hypotheses that I have been developing over the past several years. In the spring of 2014, I had a conversation about teaching with Naropa's Dr. Richard Brown, who suggested that, contrary to conventional university models of teaching, a transformative educational experience depends upon the integration of three components: intellectual, physical, and emotional engagement. Intrigued, I wanted to test all of these ideas in the classroom, and to do so I devised a course evenly divided between classroom instruction, experiential learning, and guided reflection (intellectual, physical, and emotional components). The students and I met in the classroom on campus for the first week and a half of the summer course, then spent two and a half weeks conducting field work in the Alaskan wilderness, and concluded in the classroom again for intensive written reflection.

As a set of problems, the social, political, and environmental issues that contribute to global climate change are challenging for students because they feel overwhelmed when forced to contend with something so dire and that seems to defy realistic solutions. In designing this course, I wanted to present theories of sustainability and GCC in ways that would allow students to create some emotional distance from the topic, to perceive the problems clearly and lucidly, and to find acceptance and peace in the reality of our contemporary lives.

My teaching and learning goals with this pedagogical design were as follows:

1. To help students think carefully and critically about global environmental issues without feeling overwhelmed or discouraged;
2. To engage with the course material in intellectual, experiential, and emotional or reflective ways;
3. To use this three-part engagement to help students devise new, innovative solutions to the global sustainability problem;
4. To empower students to connect learning with experience and profound reflection.

Academic researchers have long argued for the power and merit of experiential learning. These experiences actively immerse and reflectively engage the inner world of the learner, as a whole person (including physical-bodily, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually) with their intricate 'outer world' of the learning environment to create memorable, rich and effective experiences for learning. I wanted to emphasize and engage the inner world of the learner. Instead of reading books to learn about massive global environmental problems, and then end the course studying a few theoretical solutions, I wanted students instead to witness and experience these problems in the world beyond campus. I wanted them to think carefully and deeply about the meaning of life, both as an abstract concept and as a mode of personal inquiry. By combining experiential learning with contemplative practice, I might be able to facilitate profound changes in a student's life. Quantitatively, this outcome is hard to measure, so I collected a lot of qualitative data using two surveys that required significant reflection.

Additionally, for the final project, each student had to write a lengthy essay divided into three parts: presentation of research and conclusions, selections from the field journal, and personal reflection. This assignment design, of course, mirrored the three components of the class, and was intended to help students synthesize the lessons of a fully engaged, multidimensional, deeply contextualized experience. All of the students achieved a high-degree of success with the four primary learning outcomes and their perspectives changed dramatically. By the end of the course, they all felt empowered to create change, however small, in the worlds that surround them.