

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

BROWN UNIVERSITY • VOLUME 9 / NUMBER 2 • JANUARY 2005



Brown/Wheaton Teaching Laboratory in the Liberal Arts: One Semester Old and Going Strong

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Brown graduate student Susanne Wiedemann (American Civilization) served as Brown's first official Visiting Instructor and Intern in the Liberal Arts at Wheaton College this past semester. The Brown/Wheaton Teaching Laboratory in the Liberal Arts (TLLA) program was established last spring to offer up to six advanced Brown graduate students each year the opportunity to teach a course in their academic field as they are mentored in their work by senior Wheaton faculty members. The students also gain valuable experience in the responsibilities and challenges of professional life beyond the classroom in a liberal arts college community, participating in departmental and college-wide faculty meetings, as well as workshops in the College's Teaching and Learning Program, and sharing their scholarly research with their new colleagues.

Ms. Wiedemann's course on the "Holocaust in U.S. Literature and Culture" was a part of the English department's fall offerings. It examined the representation, commemoration and interpretation of the Holocaust in American literary texts, film, drama, memorials and museums and explored some of the controversies surrounding issues of representation, identity, memory, aesthetics, and cultural production.

At the end of the semester the ten students in the course gave it and the instructor their highest ratings on course evaluations, calling the course "intellectually stimulating" and "the strongest English course I have ever taken," and commenting on the passion Ms. Wiedemann brought to her teaching. They particularly noted how the course challenged them to think about cultural issues they would not otherwise have understood and how important the writing assignments (the course was "Writing Intensive") were to their learning.

Wheaton English department chair Paula Krebs and Religion department chair Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus were Ms. Wiedemann's mentors. They helped her to design a course that met Wheaton's guidelines for Writing Intensive courses, to acculturate herself within Wheaton's liberal arts environment, and generally to fulfill the purposes of this unique program. Professor Krebs reports that she "really enjoyed sitting in on [Ms. Wiedemann's] classes and chatting with her about teaching strategies and innovations. The entire department loved her research colloquium in October, when students and faculty were treated to a lively lecture about her research on German Jewish emigration to the U.S. via Shanghai. Susanne was a great fit for Wheaton, a perfect teacher to inaugurate the program."

As stated on the program's web site (at <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/clc/lab.html>), its goals are "to develop advanced competency in undergraduate teaching in a liberal arts environment. Brown/Wheaton interns in the liberal arts will find and enact their own most effective teaching style, will learn how to teach with concern for the whole student, and will experience the special multidisciplinary collegiality that characterizes the undergraduate liberal arts college. This will include learning how to articulate for a broader audience the most exciting elements of their own research, and how to advance from teaching what others have learned toward professing their own knowledge." Wheaton's provost, Susanne Woods, a former Director of Graduate Studies in the English department at Brown, notes that the program has been designed "to enhance graduate students' confidence in their own expertise, as well as develop their sense of themselves as professional colleagues."

Next semester two more graduate students, Amy Vines (English) and Celeste Sullivan (Anthropology) will teach their own courses at Wheaton and be mentored by Wheaton faculty. Some time in late February or early March the Graduate School will invite and review candidates for liberal arts internships at Wheaton for 2005-2006. For further information about these opportunities and this process see the web site

identified above. The internship program is coordinated jointly by the Sheridan Center and Wheaton's College Learning Center and reflects concerns at both institutions for how future faculty are prepared to work effectively in an environment often significantly different from that of the research universities in which they complete their professional study.