

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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## *Faculty Forum: Course Innovations*

Colleagues across the University were asked to describe any brainstorming they may have had about recent course and teaching innovations. Clearly there is a lot of brainstorming about teaching going on at Brown! Many thanks to Jim Head (Geological Sciences), Catherine W. Zerner (*History of Art & Architecture*), Gregory Elliott (*Sociology*), Leslie Welch (*Psychology*), Bil Johnson (*Education*), Dennis Michaud (*Economics*), Marcos Arruda (*Watson Institute*), Catherine McArdle Kelleher (*Watson Institute*) and Keren R. McGinity (*History*) for their contributions to this issue. We hope that this will inspire colleagues across campus.

The "Faculty Forum" is a regular feature of *The Teaching Exchange* and we hope that YOU will be inspired by these ideas to share yours in the next issue.

**Jim Head**, Prof. (*Geological Sciences*)

We had excellent results employing the CAVE immersive virtual reality facility at Brown to take introductory students in Geological Sciences 5 (Earth, Moon and Mars) on a virtual field trip to Mars. You can get an idea of what we were up to by referring to the following paper that describes the facility and the approach. The students loved it and learned a lot!

*Reference:* Head, J. W., A. van Dam, S. Fulcomer, A. Forsberg, Prabhat, G. Rosser, and S. M. Milkovich (2005), ADVISER: Immersive Scientific Visualization Applied to Mars Research and Exploration, Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing, Vol. 71, No. 10, October 2005, pp. 1219-1225.

(<http://www.planetary.brown.edu/pdfs/3128.pdf>, #3128).

**Catherine W. Zerner**, Prof. (*History of Art & Architecture*)

I am doing a seminar on cartography and the *imaginaire* in the Early Modern World. I should mention that digital slides in PowerPoint are working well--not least because it means I can photocopy the lecture and hand it out with the slide IDs in class and also post it to the web. I am planning to take students to the John Carter Brown Library and to the John Hay Library for direct study of maps next semester and to profit from the Cartography series and conference that Ancient Studies is doing. I tried an innovation for final review that worked wonderfully: the students sat down in a group and decided what the most important monuments for the final should be & we chose the IDs from this list. They also decided--on the basis of relevance--which of the readings they would most like to write about. Their choices were good and I used them to create the essay questions for the final.

**Gregory Elliott**, Prof. (*Sociology*)

In my seminar (SO 187-40: Alternatives to Violence), in addition and prior to the regular weekly discussions (led by pairs of students), I require that students watch a film (fiction, documentary) that has direct relevance to the issues being discussed in the seminar meeting that week. (For example, before discussing war, we watched "Coming Home"; before discussing psychological motivations for violence, we watched "Do the Right Thing.") The discussion leaders then asked the students to apply the abstract concepts and processes contained in the weekly readings to the behaviors found in the films. In addition, I required students to write a weekly journal in which they blended their personal reactions to the readings and the film. I believe that this combination of activities helped bring them closer to understanding violence and nonviolence in a more complex, sophisticated, and yet highly personal way.

**Leslie Welch**, Assoc. Prof. (*Psychology*)

This is less an innovation and more of a realization. I taught a new course this semester about research methodology (PY109) and I discovered that, while it is much more class-time efficient to tell the students which analyses to do and why, the students learn more if they are asked to figure out which analyses make sense. I had to resist the urge to fill in the silences after my questions and wait until the students said something. I need to learn more about how to guide discussions such that I point the right direction without giving the answers.

**Bil Johnson**, Senior Lecturer (*Education*): This is the description for a new course I am offering on *Critical Pedagogy and White Privilege: Crossing Boundaries in Urban Education*:

These two topics will be studied through the lenses of Cultural Studies and Education (as well as history, sociology, political science, and other disciplines). The course will use a variety of media (audio, video, computer technology, etc.), print materials (looking at the evolution of “whiteness” as an area of academic inquiry and the development of critical pedagogy) and research that involves observation and field work. A major question driving the course will be: *How do educators approach teaching about White Privilege in urban settings (if they do at all --- and if not, why not?) and what difference does it make in student learning, attitudes, and values?* The observation and field work component of the course is designed to start a dialogue, particularly with Providence area secondary teachers, about the issues of White Privilege and critical pedagogy.

*Course Requirements:*

This course is mandatory S/NC and enrollment is limited to 20. Students will be expected to write a short critique of each book read and to respond in a journal to the questions listed in the syllabus each week. A final, reflective Portfolio will be required and students will briefly present their findings during our final session.

*Final Portfolio Requirements:*

- All journal entries with one “grand” reflective piece introducing them, explaining what students see in looking back over a semester’s worth of journals
- All book critiques with one comprehensive reflective piece which comments on individual books and looks at the entire reading list and reflects critically on it. What should we keep and what should we delete? Recommendations for next year’s reading list?
- All notes, critiques, bibliographic material, etc. from the field work. These should be introduced with a piece that’s basically “What I learned from researching and presenting this material.”
- Finally: The portfolio should conclude with a piece about what students think “Critical Pedagogy and White Privilege” is, now that you’ve finished the course.

If students want to offer suggestions to could improve the course that would be great.

With all of these sections, the reflective pieces should have a strong component of “Here’s what I learned.... (or “Here’s what I was frustrated with.....”).”

**Dennis Michaud, Adj. Assistant Prof. (*Economics*)**

I tried an interesting approach in Economics 133 (The Economics of Competitive Strategy) this term. As part of the students' course assignment they met with the senior management of Washington Trust Company [Providence, RI]. The bank provided both public and private documents to teams of students, the SVP of Strategic Planning came to class twice to provide background information. The students then worked in teams of 4-6 to formulate an intermediate strategy grounded in an application of micro-economic modeling for the bank. The senior management of the bank (board of directors) was on campus this past Monday for final presentations and recommendations by the teams. A full written report by each team accompanied the presentations.

This was a great deal of work for the students on top of a rather lengthy take-home midterm and a final exam. But the feedback from the students and the Washington Trust was overwhelmingly positive.

This approach is not easy to do. Clearly, it is not appropriate for every course. Moreover, it takes quite a bit of negotiation by faculty to convince a firm / organization to invest this much time in the education process. I do think the benefits justify the effort expended. I am going to use a similar approach as part of EC 134 next spring.

**Marcos Arruda, Visiting Prof. (*Watson Institute*)**

As a visiting professor this semester, I taught a seminar at the Center for Latin American Studies, Watson Institute, entitled "Socio-economic Development and the Culture of Solidarity in Latin America". I had 29 students in my class.

Here are briefly the main components of my method:

*Assignments*

- 1-2p papers on one of the readings in each class – total: 7 papers
- 1-2p papers on two films related to the theme – total: 2 papers

- 4p chronicle, role playing in the context of a third film - I organized a collective film presentation and was available for a half-house debate on the film, taking as reference the theme of our Seminar.
- 10p book report
- 3p final paper
- Research on the socio-economy of a chosen country of Latin America and the Caribbean, presentation in class using PowerPoint or posters.

### *Method*

- I gave personal attention to each student: learning their names; answering all their emails; being available in a broader span of office hours; giving them a chance to make corrections to their papers before giving them a grade; calling to my office for guidance those who are having difficulty with understanding the lectures, discussions, readings or with writing their papers.
- I use methods of motivation, rather than coercion. The result is high quality and high productivity!
- I invited outside speakers who had relevant experiences and thoughts to share with the class. The students were highly appreciated of the pertinence and authenticity of their testimonies, according to the Seminar evaluations.
- I organized an informal cultural-educational event with the class at the cooperative house of one of the students. We shared poems, tales, images, songs, music, we ate together, and also rehearsed on how to organize a solidarity-based market using a currency created by the group – the *Clementine* – as the means of exchange. “By changing the currency to *Clementine* we attempted to shift our understanding of money from an object with intrinsic value to a *means* of exchange. The currency does not exist in physical form, only in terms of the physical output and costs of the goods within the economy. There is a distinctly egalitarian effect of valuing currency in terms of human labor. The huge differentiation of per-hour labor between a banker and a janitor, for example, seem absurd when this new lens is applied. A more realistic interconnection between income and *human labor* is established in this network of solidarity (...) Instead of competitive strategy, there was a distinct emphasis on *harmony* and making sure everybody got what they needed. Individuality is not undermined, but *empathized*.” (one of the students in a reflection paper on the event).

**Catherine McArdle Kelleher, Senior Research Associate** (*Watson Institute*)

One thought in the middle of marking exams: In my freshman seminar on the principles and practice of arms control (IR 10), I set a problem on a topic for which we had had an experienced outside speaker, divided the students into 5 teams, and allowed one group to play umpire - adding changes to the initial scenario, creating rules for negotiation and action, *et al.* Students had to prepare as a team a statement of policy on the issue which each distributed to all (a shorter "eyes only" memo for themselves and me) on what their expectations and negotiation strategy were. The umpires did a parallel effort for their domain. It worked well, I think. Students on the whole took the exercise seriously, worked hard, and as in all simulations, ended the semester on a high. It is not revolutionary or terribly innovative but they were pleased, and I found the learning involved was both wide and deep.

**Keren R. McGinity, Visiting Assistant Professor** (*History*)

I created a "contract" for students with themselves. Basically, I outlined the bases for grading their final research papers and spelled out all of the guidelines for the assignment. At the bottom of the handout, I wrote:

I, \_\_\_\_ (fill in your first name), understand the bases for grading and the guideline and will do my absolute best.

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

I told the students to review the handout before turning in their papers and to sign it as a commitment to themselves (i.e., not turn it in to me). I also explained that I was doing this to dispel some of the mystery behind grading and to help them reach their full potential. The students seemed to appreciate having the information and the humor behind signing a contract with themselves.