

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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## *Faculty Forum: Teaching Innovation*

*Brown faculty have much to share with colleagues about the innovations they have introduced into their classrooms. This issue features the use of **interdisciplinary methodology to provide stimulating contemporary context for a literature course**. Many thanks to Prof. Stephanie Merrim (Comparative Literature and Hispanic Studies) for this thoughtful contribution. 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 *Teaching Exchange*.*

### **Prof. Stephanie Merrim**

*Comparative Literature and Hispanic Studies*

SP-133 "Wordscapes of Colonial Spanish America: Nature and City," a weekly 2 1/2 hour seminar last spring, was my first colonial course on the undergraduate level and I was eager to for it to be dynamic. To render the difficult, even arid material exciting to undergraduates, I made the course *interdisciplinary*, combining literature, history, law, art, architecture, urban-planning, and film.

Other innovative features of the course included: a *coursepack* with a "Gallery" section containing colonial maps, art, and architecture, etc. coordinated to each week's readings that provided outreach and stimuli for discussion; a *course website* featuring color renditions of some of the Gallery images (set up with the help of student technology assistants); a *peer-facilitated study group* (set up with the help of the Resource Center) led by a Mexican exchange student taking the course to help students with language issues of the 16th- and 17th-century texts; a *session at the John Carter Brown library* in which students were able to have direct contact with first editions of our texts; and *guest speakers* (including Dean Elizabeth Hart, an expert on colonial Peru).

To further stimulate involvement with the material and class discussion, students wrote and submitted before each class short *commentaries* on the readings, which were returned to them in class with substantial feedback. Class discussion of the texts revolved

around the students' commentaries and the visual prompts, and each week included small *group-work*, often of a creative nature. I was privileged to have a superb and dedicated group of students who braved the resistant texts and rose to the challenge of an interdisciplinary course.