

UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo

Thursday, January 19, 2017

Student Union Ballroom A

12:00 - 1:30 pm

LEARNING THROUGH INTRADEPARTMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HISTORY MILESTONE

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The teaching practice and the need it addresses:

The History Department established HIST 251 in 1996 to supply students with the opportunity to acquire and develop the methodological skills and habits of critical thinking and analysis considered essential for student success. Instead of textbooks, which can be costly, dull, and fall short of meeting our students' needs, students in my HIST 251 classes read and discuss journal articles produced by History Department faculty. For 7 years, the articles have proven to be effective vehicles for helping students learn about the various fields of history, methodology, and organizational strategies for positing and supporting arguments. They also allow students to meet most of the UULOs and to become familiar with their future learning opportunities and the professors who will guide them through their degree programs.

Evidence this practice benefits UNLV students:

Students appreciate the opportunity to learn from the articles, as demonstrated by the following selected responses:

- *"I learned a lot more about the historical resources UNLV has to offer...quite a bit about the various ways one can examine history."*
- *"Students never feel too stressed even in light of the relatively heavy workload."*
- *"Provides a great understanding that history is dynamic and debated. Insight on what history scholars actually do."*
- *"A wide understanding of the many fields and themes of history."*
- *"Great explanations, helpful with the course material and the way everything is taught benefits students."*

I have observed multiple benefits:

1. Improved engagement and learning. (Variety of topics and methodologies hold students' interest throughout the term.)
2. Improved reading and critical thinking ability. (Sophistication of journal articles together with reading guides and discussion encourage the development of higher order thinking.)
3. Improved oral and written communication. (Students use articles as models, aspiring in their own writing to professional argumentative structure and support, vocabulary, and style. Class discussion helps students become familiar with academic discussion and debate.)
4. Improved research skills. (Searching for and retrieving articles helps students become familiar with Lied Library resources.)
5. Inexpensive. (Students pay only for printing articles.)
6. Students become familiar with future learning opportunities.
7. Versatile. (Based on student needs, articles can easily be removed/replaced without re-working the entire course.)

Resources and where to find them:

Journal articles are available through Lied Library resources. A book chapter produced by faculty could also be used, either as a physical resource deposited at Lied or as a digitized copy on Web Campus.

How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

The most important considerations are article (or chapter) selection, staging, and developing content to help students grasp the significance of, and become comfortable with learning from, professional scholarship. Ideally, each article or chapter will not only introduce students to a facet of the discipline but also reflect a particularly significant methodological or analytical approach. Articles or book chapters can then be staged as required reading to suit an instructor's goals. Allow suitable time before students read each article (or chapter) to introduce students to the scholar and to the themes of the article or book, explaining the purpose for its inclusion in the course and what students are expected to get out of the reading. Reading guides, along with any specialized vocabulary, help students learn to read actively and give them a way to organize their thinking in preparation for class discussion. I poll students for their opinion about the utility of each article after discussion and again at the end of term to help me decide about content for subsequent terms. The faceted approach along with the size of this resource pool makes it easy over time to replace articles based on a teacher's or students' perceptions about their utility without reworking the entire course.