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Final Report, June 23, 2014
Jeremy A. Murray, Assistant Professor, History Department
Kathleen Nadeau, Professor, Anthropology Department
HUM 328 Asian Cultural Traditions
Winter 2014 Team Teaching Grant
Currently Teaching, Spring 2014

Course Abstract

Professors Nadeau and Murray realized that the course HUM 328: Asian Cultural Traditions is inherently interdisciplinary, and we believed that it was an ideal candidate for a team-teaching project that involved us, an anthropologist and an historian. Numerous faculty members have taught this course across campus, and it presents different challenges to every faculty member who teaches it. We proposed embracing these interdisciplinary challenges through team teaching, which has allowed us to present a dynamic course to students who have been prompted to explore Asian cultural traditions from both an anthropological and historical perspective. Knowledge of the cultural practices of the great Asian landmass are increasingly urgent to the Western observer, from India, to China, to Japan, to Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands. Our students have had access to a deep knowledge of these cultural traditions and practices from an interdisciplinary perspective that has brought together anthropology, history, religion, literature, and arts. Mastery of the social, cultural, and political history of Asia is also fast becoming necessary in the education of every undergraduate student's well-rounded education, and we have been providing this expertise to the course.

Course Implementation

It has been a delight for us, Kathleen Nadeau and Jeremy Murray, to work together preparing and teaching HUM 328: Asian Cultural Traditions. Coming from very different disciplinary backgrounds, with specializations in very different regions, it has been an extremely edifying experience for both of us, and we feel the students have richly benefited from our teaching dynamics, our rapport, and our enjoyment of the material.

Through the winter of 2014, we developed the syllabus with close attention to detail, and ensuring a fair system of evaluation for the students. We used Carol Heinz's textbook as the foundation for the course, and then emphasized our own strengths to highlight the richest portions of the course with the most expertise that we could bring to bear on the course. Professor Nadeau brought to life the struggles of women within many parts of the developing world and Asia, including but not limited to India and the Philippines. Professor Murray's background in Chinese history allowed him to bring to life the traditions of Chinese philosophy, and highlight the dynamic development of these ideas and traditions within their shifting historical context. Both of us spent the winter and spring learning a great deal about each other's work, and also about the many fields of Asian history that were required of us, from Japan and Korea, to South and Southeast Asia, and everything in between. Pushing ourselves and each other out of our respective comfort zones has allowed us to keep engaged and active in our instruction of the material, and it has been a welcome and delightful challenge.

The interdisciplinary dynamic of the course has been evident and constantly on the surface of our conversations from the start. As we designed the syllabus, the present conditions of Asian societies was a constant in the anthropological perspective that Professor Nadeau brought to the course. The urgency of present struggles, such as that of rural Indian women, came through viscerally in Professor Nadeau's lectures, and the impact of the material was powerful in the lecture hall. Professor Nadeau's anthropological methods, and her research findings in recent work influenced the direction of our coverage of this material, and the political and social urgency of the material struck the students and clearly had an effect on their global awareness. Professor Murray's Chinese history background put into context the changing world of China today. The long trends of history can often illuminate present conditions, and sometimes even point toward future developments. Starting with the past, from the Confucian roots of Chinese society, Professor Murray brought to life the social ideals, including a high premium placed on filial piety or ancestor worship, which is in jeopardy today as many Chinese young people leave home for work opportunities in the city instead of staying home to care for their parents in the Confucian tradition. The academic influences of Confucianism were also highlighted in Professor Murray's teaching, showing how Chinese academics can be so potently pressurized that students can despair in the midst of preparation for the dreaded college entrance exams. We feel strongly that we have succeeded in bring both historical and anthropological methods from our regions of specialization to the course materials in a way that made it both urgent and enjoyable to the students. The main idea of this grant, in our eyes, has been to ensure that this synergy could take place, and we are confident that this has been a success, in the above examples as well as in many other activities, topics, and projects.

Bringing in documentary and feature films helped to bring the material to life, and the documentary series, "Lost Treasures of the Ancient World" put faces to the names and events of ancient India, Japan, and China. Akira Kurosawa's classic film, "Rashomon" (1951) challenged the students and instructors to question everything, to sometimes not trust our eyes and ears, and to understand how one story can have many different versions, and one phenomenon can have many different truths. This was one of the most important lessons in our opinions, in teaching the diversity of views in the Asian cultural traditions examined. Each student was required to post four times to the Blackboard Discussion Board, and to write a short paper about the film, and also other news stories, lectures, readings, and other relevant topics.

Offering extra credit is always a nice incentive to keep the students engaged. Not everyone learns the same, and suffering a setback on a conventional exam can cause students to lose hope. We put our heads together to come up with a series of extra credit assignments to keep the students engaged, and allow them opportunities to highlight their own strengths, and to demonstrate an earnest commitment to a strong grade. There were many events occurring across campus, including the CSUSB Modern China Lecture Series, film screenings, Lubos PASO dramatic performances of Pilipino culture, and author workshops. Students were urged to attend these, and then to post about them on the Blackboard Discussion Forum for extra credit. Attendance and reading was encouraged through bonus pop quizzes, two of which were given on unannounced days

throughout the quarter, intended as a reward for both doing the readings and arriving promptly to class. Finally, our last extra credit bonus opportunity was for the student to go over the multiple choice midterm and write a short paragraph of explanation about every question the student got wrong, as a means of really learning the material, and understanding where the disconnect was in the learning process. The students greatly appreciated all of these opportunities, especially the last one, which we believe is a rich and productive way to ensure not only success within the confines of the course, but increased awareness of weaknesses and disconnects within the individual students' learning process.

This is the progress report for our work thus far, and we look forward to grading the papers, assessing participation grades, and proctoring and grading the final, after which we will submit our final report. Thank you to the TRC for supporting our efforts, and this has been a rewarding experience for us both.

Course Conclusions

It has been a delight for us, Kathleen Nadeau and Jeremy Murray, to work together preparing and teaching HUM 328: Asian Cultural Traditions.

It is our sincere hope that we are able to continue teaching the course together. In the fall, Professor Nadeau will be teaching the course, and even though we will not officially be co-teaching the course, Professor Murray will offer his services to lecture in several of the sessions. The same will be true in reverse when Professor Murray teaches the course the next time he is scheduled for it.

The students were polled on several occasions and their reactions to the team-teaching experience has been universally positive. There was a clear sense that our respective fields of expertise were fully realized and were allowed to bloom in the classroom in an interdisciplinary and mutually beneficial context. The students were given study guides and a clear idea of what to expect on the final, and they did extremely well, with the average grade in the low 80s, and many students with high 90s grades.

We were able to offer many opportunities for bonus points by attending extracurricular activities across campus. If students posted about these on the Blackboard Discussion Forum they could have access to additional bonus points, and so the most diligent and enthusiastic students ended the course with grades in excess of 100 percent. While our grade roster does not allow a grade of A+, or A++, the students were doubtless gratified to see how well they did in their Blackboard scores, which did reflect their "above and beyond" grade points.

Naturally, as in any class of this size, not every single student succeeded. With two instructors, however, we were able to contact students who were slipping in their grades. With more than one instructor, we could email any students who were in danger of failing, and this served to save several students. It gave them a sense that their instructors cared about them. Having two professors in a class of 170 students allows more of a familiar experience for the students, since we could divide the labor of keeping in touch

with students. In this way, we can say with confidence that none of the students failed as long as they came to class, did the readings, and truly cared about succeeding in the class.

Final Thoughts

The trick, in our view, will be finding venues to continue team-teaching. In conversations with TRC staff, deans, and respective chairs, this has been considered one of the main obstacles to continuity and institutional memory here. We did not come up with a solid solution, except to plan well in advance, get chairs and/or deans to give one of us course releases, and we should be able to team-teach on a regular basis. Is team-teaching equivalent to teaching a full course? In many ways, yes, since we all attend all courses and do our utmost to not simply divide the work but to really make it a rich interdisciplinary experience.

In the meantime, until there is a solid structure in place to make this institutional memory of team-teaching a more self-regenerating process, we are going to do our best to volunteer our services when the other is teaching the course, for a number of lectures on our field of expertise. This is a kind of de facto team-teaching, though of course it is not as strongly supported institutionally as a course where we both are teaching on record. We are open to further discussions on how to best implement a longer-term team teaching structure, and would be happy to submit a follow up report on this specific topic, based on our experiences, if it is deemed potentially useful.

Thank you for this fantastic opportunity. It was a joy and a richly rewarding experience.